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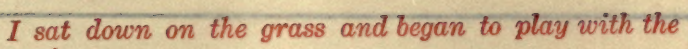

I sat down on the grass and began to play with the goat

VOL. VIII, FRONTISPIECE

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY

KENDALL WARREN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

PAUL-LEON JAZET · HENRI PILLE

VOLUME EIGHT

REVISED EDITION

NEW YORK

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THE CONFESSION OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE life must be lived before the history of a life can be written, hence it is not my life that I am writing.

Having been attacked in early youth by an abominable moral malady, I relate what has happened to me during three years. If I were the only victim of this disease, I would say nothing, but as there are many others who suffer from the same evil, I write for them, although I am not sure that they will pay any attention to it; in case my warning is unheeded, I shall still have derived this benefit from my words in having cured myself, and, like the fox caught in a trap, I shall have devoured my captive foot.

CHAPTER II

During the wars of the Empire, while the husbands and brothers were in Germany, the anxious mothers brought forth an ardent, pale, nervous generation. Conceived between two battles, educated amidst the noises of war, thousands of children looked about them with a somber eye while testing their puny muscles. From time to time their blood-stained fathers would appear, raise them on their gold-laced bosoms, then place them on the ground and remount their horses.

The life of Europe was centered in one man; all were trying to fill their lungs with the air which he had breathed. Every year France presented that man with three hundred thousand of her youth; it was the tax paid to Cæsar, and, without that troop behind him, he could not follow his fortune. It was the escort he needed that he might traverse the world, and then perish in a little valley in a deserted island, under the weeping willow.

Never had there been so many sleepless nights as in the time of that man; never had there been seen, hanging over the ramparts of the cities, such a nation of desolate mothers; never was there such a silence about those who spoke of death. And yet there was never such joy, such life, such fanfares of war, in all hearts. Never was there

such pure sunlight as that which dried all this blood. God made the sun for this man, they said, and they called it the Sun of Austerlitz. But he made this sunlight himself with his ever-thundering cannons which dispelled all clouds but those which succeed the day of battle.

It was this air of the spotless sky, where shone so much glory, where glistened so many swords, that the youth of the time breathed. They well knew that they were destined to the hecatomb; but they regarded Murat as invulnerable, and the emperor had been seen to cross a bridge where so many bullets whistled that they wondered if he could die. And even if one must die, what did it matter? Death itself was so beautiful, so noble, so illustrious, in his battle-scarred purple! It borrowed the color of hope, it reaped so many ripening harvests that it became young, and there was no more old age. All the cradles of France, as all its tombs, were armed with shield and buckler; there were no more old men, there were corpses or demi-gods.

Nevertheless, the immortal emperor stood one day on a hill watching seven nations engaged in mutual slaughter; as he did not know whether he would be master of all the world or only half, Azrael passed along, touched him with the tip of his wing, and pushed him into the Ocean. At the noise of his fall, the dying powers sat up in their beds of pain; and stealthily advancing with

furtive tread, all the royal spiders made the partition of Europe, and the purple of Cæsar became the frock of Harlequin.

Just as the traveler, sure of his way, hastens night and day through rain and sunlight, regardless of vigils or of dangers; but when he has reached his home and seated himself before the fire, he is seized upon by a feeling of extreme lassitude and can hardly drag himself to his bed: thus France, the widow of Cæsar, suddenly felt her wound. She fell through sheer exhaustion, and lapsed into a sleep so profound that her old kings, believing her dead, wrapped about her a white shroud. The old army, its hair whitened in service, returned exhausted with fatigue, and the hearths of deserted castles sadly flickered into life.

Then the men of the Empire, who had been through so much, who had lived in such carnage, kissed their emaciated wives and spoke of their first love; they looked into the fountains of their natal prairies and found themselves so old, so mutilated, that they bethought themselves of their sons, in order that they might close their eyes in peace. They asked where they were; the children came from the schools, and seeing neither sabers, nor cuirasses, neither infantry nor cavalry, they asked in turn where were their fathers. They were told that the war was ended, that Cæsar was dead, and that the portraits of

Wellington and of Blücher were suspended in the antechambers of the consulates and the embassies, with these two words beneath: *Salvatoribus mundi.*

Then there seated itself on a world in ruins an anxious youth. All the children were drops of burning blood which had inundated the earth; they were born in the bosom of war, for war. For fifteen years they had dreamed of the snows of Moscow and of the sun of the pyramids. They had not gone beyond their native towns; but they were told that through each gate of these towns lay the road to a capital of Europe. They had in their heads all the world; they beheld the earth, the sky, the streets and the highways; all these were empty, and the bells of parish churches resounded faintly in the distance.

Pale fantoms shrouded in black robes, slowly traversed the country; others knocked at the doors of houses, and when admitted, drew from their pockets large well-worn documents with which they drove out the tenants. From every direction came men still trembling with the fear which had seized them when they fled twenty years before. All began to urge their claims, disputing loudly and crying for help; it was strange that a single death should attract so many crows.

The king of France was on his throne, looking here and there to see if he could perchance

find a bee in the royal tapestry. Some held out their hats, and he gave them money; others showed him a crucifix, and he kissed it; others contented themselves with pronouncing in his ear great names of powerful families, and he replied to these by inviting them into his *grand' salle,* where the echoes were more sonorous; still others showed him their old cloaks, when they had carefully effaced the bees, and to these he gave new apparel.

The children saw all this, thinking that the spirit of Cæsar would soon land at Cannes and breathe upon this larva; but the silence was unbroken and they saw floating in the sky only the paleness of the lily. When these children spoke of glory, they were answered: "Become priests;" when they spoke of hope, of love, of power, of life: "Become priests."

And yet there mounted the rostrum a man who held in his hand a contract between the king and the people; he began by saying that glory was a beautiful thing, and ambition and war as well; but there was something still more beautiful, and it was called liberty.

The children raised their heads and remembered that their grandfathers had spoken thus. They remembered having seen in certain obscure corners of the paternal home mysterious marble busts with long hair and a Latin inscription; they remembered seeing their grandsires

shake their heads and speak of a stream of blood more terrible than that of the emperor. There was something in that word liberty that made their hearts beat with the memory of a terrible past and the hope of a glorious future.

They trembled at the word; but returning to their homes they encountered on the street three panniers which were being borne to Clamart; there were, within, three young men who had pronounced that word liberty too distinctly.

A strange smile hovered on their lips at that sad sight; but other speakers, mounted on the rostrum, began to publicly estimate what ambition had cost and how very dear was glory; they pointed out the horror of war and called the hecatombs butcheries. And they spoke so often and so long that all human illusions, like the trees in autumn, fell leaf by leaf about them, and those who listened passed their hands over their foreheads as though awakened from a feverish dream.

Some said: "The emperor has fallen because the people wished no more of him;" others added: "The people wished the king; no, liberty; no, reason; no, religion; no, the English constitution; no, absolutism;" and the last one said: "No, none of these things, but repose."

Three elements entered into the life which offered itself to these children: behind them a past forever destroyed, moving uneasily on its

ruins with all the fossils of centuries of absolutism; before them the aurora of an immense horizon, the first gleams of the future; and between these two worlds—something like the Ocean which separates the old world from Young America, something vague and floating, a troubled sea filled with wreckage, traversed from time to time by some distant sail or some ship breathing out a heavy vapor; the present, in a word, which separates the past from the future, which is neither the one nor the other, which resemble both, and where one can not know whether, at each step, one is treading on a seed or a piece of refuse.

It was in this chaos that choice must be made; this was the aspect presented to children full of spirit and of audacity, sons of the Empire and grandsons of the Revolution.

As for the past, they would none of it, they had no faith in it; the future, they loved it, but how? As Pygmalion loved Galatea: it was for them a lover in marble and they waited for the breath of life to animate that breast, for the blood to color those veins.

There remained then, the present, the spirit of the time, angel of the dawn who is neither night nor day; they found him seated on a lime sack filled with bones, clad in the mantle of egoism, and shivering in terrible cold. The anguish of death entered into the soul at the sight of that

specter, half mummy and half fetus; they approached it as the traveler who is shown at Strasburg the daughter of an old count of Sarvenden, embalmed in her bride's dress: that childish skeleton makes one shudder, for her slender and livid hand wears the wedding-ring and her head falls into dust in the midst of orange blossoms.

As upon the approach of a tempest there passes through the forests a terrible sound which makes all the trees shudder, to which profound silence succeeds, thus had Napoleon, in passing, shaken the world; kings felt their crowns vacillate in the storm and, raising their hands to steady them, they found only their hair, bristling with terror. The pope had traveled three hundred leagues to bless him in the name of God and to crown him with the diadem; but Napoleon had taken it from his hands. Thus everything trembled in that dismal forest of old Europe; then silence succeeded.

It is said that when you meet a mad dog if you keep quietly on your way without turning, the dog will merely follow you a short distance growling and showing his teeth; but if you allow yourself to be frightened into a movement of terror, if you but make a sudden step, he will leap at your throat and devour you; when the first bite has been taken there is no escaping him.

In European history it has often happened

that a sovereign has made that movement of terror and his people have devoured him; but if one had done it, all had not done it at the same time, that is to say, one king had disappeared, but not all royal majesty. Before the sword of Napoleon majesty made this movement, this gesture which loses everything, and not only majesty, but religion, nobility, all power both human and divine.

Napoleon dead, human and divine power were re-established, but belief in them no longer existed. A terrible danger lurks in the knowledge of what is possible, for the mind always goes farther. It is one thing to say: "That may be" and another thing to say: "That has been;" it is the first bite of the dog.

The deposition of Napoleon was the last flicker of the lamp of despotism; it destroyed and it parodied kings as Voltaire the Holy Scripture. And after him was heard a great noise: it was the stone of St. Helena which had just fallen on the ancient world. Immediately there appeared in the heavens the cold star of reason, and its rays, like those of the goddess of the night, shedding light without heat, enveloped the world in a livid shroud.

There had been those who hated the nobles, who cried out against priests, who conspired against kings; abuses and prejudices had been attacked; but all that was not so great a novelty

as to see a smiling people. If a noble or a priest or a sovereign passed, the peasants who had made war possible began to shake their heads and say: "Ah! when we saw this man at such a time and place he wore a different face." And when the throne and altar were mentioned, they replied: "They are made of four planks of wood; we have nailed them together and torn them apart." And when some one said: "People, you have recovered from the errors which led you astray; you have recalled your kings and your priests," they replied: "We have nothing to do with those prattlers." And when some one said: "People, forget the past, work and obey," they arose from their seats and a dull rumbling could be heard. It was the rusty and notched saber in the corner of the cottage chimney. Then they hastened to add: "Then keep quiet, at least; if no one harms you, do not seek to harm." Alas! they were content with that.

But youth was not content. It is certain that there are in man two occult powers engaged in a death struggle: the one, clear-sighted and cold, is concerned with reality, calculation, weight, and judges the past; the other is thirsty for the future and eager for the unknown. When passion sways man, reason follows him weeping and warning him of his danger; but when man listens to the voice of reason, when he stops at her request and says: "What a fool I am; where

am I going?" passion calls to him: "And must I die?"

A feeling of extreme uneasiness began to ferment in all young hearts. Condemned to inaction by the powers which governed the world, delivered to vulgar pedants of every kind, to idleness and to ennui, the youth saw the foaming billows which they had prepared to meet, subside. All these gladiators, glistening with oil, felt in the bottom of their souls an insupportable wretchedness. The richest became libertines; those of moderate fortune followed some profession and resigned themselves to the sword or to the robe. The poorest gave themselves up with cold enthusiasm to great thoughts, plunged into the frightful sea of aimless effort. As human weakness seeks association and as men are herds by nature, politics became mingled with it. There were struggles with the *garde du corps* on the steps of the legislative assembly; at the theater, Talma wore a peruke which made him resemble Cæsar; every one flocked to the burial of a liberal deputy.

But of the members of the two parties there was not one who, upon returning home, did not bitterly realize the emptiness of his life and the feebleness of his hands.

While life outside was so colorless and so mean, the interior life of society assumed a somber aspect of silence; hypocrisy ruled in all

departments of conduct; English ideas of devotion, gaiety even, had disappeared. Perhaps Providence was already preparing new ways, perhaps the herald angel of future society was already sowing in the hearts of women the seeds of human independence. But it is certain that a strange thing suddenly happened: in all the salons of Paris the men passed to one side and the women to the other; and thus, the one clad in white like a bride and the other in black like an orphan began to take measurements with the eye.

Let us not be deceived: that vestment of black which the men of our time wear is a terrible symbol; before coming to this, the armor must have fallen piece by piece and the embroidery flower by flower. Human reason has overthrown all illusions; but it bears in itself sorrow, in order that it may be consoled.

The customs of students and artists, those customs so free, so beautiful, so full of youth, began to experience the universal change. Men in taking leave of women whispered the word which wounds to the death: contempt. They plunged into the dissipation of wine and courtesans. Students and artists did the same; love was treated as glory and religion: it was an old illusion. The grisette, that class so dreamy, so romantic, so tender, and so sweet in love, abandoned herself to the counting-house and to the shop. She was poor and no one loved her; she

wanted dresses and hats and she sold herself. O, misery! the young man who ought to love her, whom she loved, who used to take her to the woods of Verrieres and Romainville, to the dances on the lawn, to the suppers under the trees; he who used to talk with her as she sat near the lamp in the rear of the shop on the long winter evenings; he who shared her crust of bread moistened with the sweat of her brow, and her love at once sublime and poor; he, that same man, after having abandoned her, finds her after a night of orgie, pale and leaden, forever lost, with hunger on her lips and prostitution in her heart.

About this time two poets, whose genius was second only to that of Napoleon, consecrated their lives to the work of collecting all the elements of anguish and of grief scattered over the universe. Goethe, the patriarch of a new literature, after having painted in "Werther" the passion which leads to suicide, traced in his "Faust" the most somber human character which has ever represented evil and unhappiness. His writings began to pass from Germany into France. From his studio, surrounded by pictures and statues, rich, happy and at ease, he watched with a paternal smile, his gloomy creations marching in dismal procession across the frontiers of France. Byron replied to him by a cry of grief which made Greece tremble, and suspended

"Manfred" over the abyss as if nothingness had been the answer of the hideous enigma with which he enveloped him.

Pardon me! O, great poets! who are now but ashes and who sleep in peace! Pardon me; you are demi-gods and I am only a child who suffers. But while writing all this I can not help cursing you. Why did you not sing of the perfume of flowers, of the voices of nature, of hope and of love, of the vine and the sun, of the azure heavens and of beauty. You must have understood life, you must have suffered, and the world was crumbling to pieces about you, you wept on its ruins and you despaired; and your mistresses were false; your friends calumniated, your compatriots misunderstood; and your heart was empty; death was in your eyes, and you were the very Colossi of grief. But tell me, you noble Goethe, was there no more consoling voice in the religious murmur of your old German forests? You, for whom beautiful poesy was the sister of science, could you with their aid find in immortal nature no healing plant for the heart of their favorite? You, who were a pantheist, and antique poet of Greece, a lover of sacred forms, could you not put a little honey in the beautiful vases you made; you, who had only to smile and allow the bees to come to your lips? And thou, thou Byron, hadst thou not near Ravenna, under thy orange trees of Italy, under

thy beautiful Venetian sky, near thy dear Adriatic, hadst thou not thy well beloved? O, God! I who speak to you and who am only a feeble child, I have perhaps known sorrows that you have never suffered, and yet I believe and I hope, and yet I bless God.

When English and German ideas passed thus over our heads there ensued disgust and mournful silence, followed by a terrible convulsion. For to formulate general ideas is to change saltpeter into powder, and the Homeric brain of the great Goethe had sucked up, as an alembic, all the juice of the forbidden fruit. Those who did not read him did not believe it, knew nothing of it. Poor creatures! The explosion carried them away like grains of dust into the abyss of universal doubt.

It was a degeneration of all things of heaven and of earth that might be termed disenchantment, or if you preferred, despair; as if humanity in lethargy had been pronounced dead by those who held its place. Like a soldier who was asked: "In what do you believe?" and who replied: "In myself." Thus the youth of France, hearing that question, replied: "In nothing."

Then they formed into two camps: on one side the exalted spirits, sufferers, all the expansive souls who had need of the infinite, bowed their heads and wept; they wrapt themselves in un-

healthy dreams and there could be seen nothing but broken reeds on an ocean of bitterness. On the other side the men of the flesh remained standing, inflexible in the midst of positive joys, and cared for nothing except to count the money they had acquired. It was only a sob and a burst of laughter, the one coming from the soul, the other from the body.

This is what the soul said:

"Alas! Alas! religion has departed; the clouds of heaven fall in rain; we have no longer either hope or expectation, not even two little pieces of black wood in the shape of a cross before which to clasp our hands. The star of the future is loath to rise; it can not get above the horizon; it is enveloped in clouds, and like the sun in winter its disk is the color of blood, as in '93. There is no more love, no more glory. What heavy darkness over all the earth! And we shall be dead when the day breaks."

This is what the body said:

" Man is here below to satisfy his senses, he has more or less of white or yellow metal to which he owes more or less esteem. To eat, to drink and to sleep, that is life. As for the bonds which exist between men, friendship consists in loaning money; but one rarely has a friend whom he loves enough for that. Kinship determines inheritance; love is an exercise of the body; the only intellectual joy is vanity."

Like the Asiatic plague exhaled from the vapors of the Ganges, frightful despair stalked over the earth. Already Chateaubriand, prince of poesy, wrapping the horrible idol in his pilgrim's mantle, had placed it on a marble altar in the midst of perfumes and holy incense. Already the children were tightening their idle hands and drinking in their bitter cup the poisoned brewage of doubt. Already things were drifting toward the abyss, when the jackals suddenly emerged from the earth. A cadaverous and infected literature which had no form but that of ugliness, began to sprinkle with fetid blood all the monsters of nature.

Who will dare to recount what was passing in the colleges? Men doubted everything: the young men denied everything. The poets sung of despair; the youth came from the schools with serene brow, their faces glowing with health and blasphemy in their mouths. Moreover, the French character, being by nature gay and open, readily assimilated English and German ideas; but hearts too light to struggle and to suffer withered like crushed flowers. Thus the principle of death descended slowly and without shock from the head to the bowels. Instead of having the enthusiasm of evil we had only the negation of the good; instead of despair, insensibility. Children of fifteen seated listlessly under flowering shrubs, conversed for pastime on subjects which

would have made shudder with terror the motionless groves of Versailles. The Communion of Christ, the host, those wafers that stand as the eternal symbol of divine love, were used to seal letters; the children spit upon the bread of God.

Happy they who escaped those times! Happy they who passed over the abyss while looking up to Heaven. There are such, doubtless, and they will pity us.

It is unfortunately true that there is in blasphemy a certain discharge of power which solaces the burdened heart. When an atheist, drawing his watch, gave God a quarter of an hour in which to strike him dead, it is certain that it was a quarter of an hour of wrath and of atrocious joy. It was the paroxysm of despair, a nameless appeal to all celestial powers; it was a poor wretched creature squirming under the foot that was crushing him; it was a loud cry of pain. And who knows? In the eyes of Him who sees all things, it was perhaps a prayer.

Thus these youth found employment for their idle powers in a fondness of despair. To scoff at glory, at religion, at love, at all the world, is a great consolation for those who do not know what to do; they mock at themselves and in doing so prove the correctness of their view. And then it is pleasant to believe oneself unhappy when one is only idle and tired. Debauchery, moreover, the first conclusion of the principle of

death, is a terrible millstone for grinding the energies.

The rich said: "There is nothing real but riches, all else is a dream; let us enjoy and then let us die." Those of moderate fortune said: "There is nothing real but oblivion, all else is a dream; let us forget and let us die." And the poor said: "There is nothing real but unhappiness, all else is a dream; let us blaspheme and die."

This is too black? It is exaggerated? What do you think of it? Am I a misanthrope? Allow me to make a reflection.

In reading the history of the fall of the Roman Empire, it is impossible to overlook the evil that the Chustions, so admirable in the desert, did the state when they were in power. "When I think," said Montesquieu, "of the profound ignorance into which the Greek clergy plunged the laity, I am obliged to compare them to the Scythians of whom Herodotus speaks, who put out the eyes of their slaves in order that nothing might distract their attention from their work. . . . No affair of state, no peace, no truce, no negotiation, no marriage could be transacted by any one but the clergy. The evils of this system were beyond belief."

Montesquieu might have added: Christianity destroyed the emperors but it saved the people. It opened to the barbarians the palaces of Con-

stantinople, but it opened the doors of cottages to the ministering angels of Christ. It had much to do with the great ones of earth. And what is more interesting than the death-rattle of an empire corrupt to the very marrow of its bones, than the somber galvanism under the influence of which the skeleton of tyranny danced upon the tombs of Heliogabalus and Caracalla! What a beautiful thing that mummy of Rome, embalmed in the perfumes of Nero and swathed in the shroud of Tiberius! It had to do, messieurs the politicians, with finding the poor and giving them life and peace; it had to do with allowing the worms and tumors to destroy the monuments of shame, while drawing from the ribs of this mummy a virgin as beautiful as the mother of the Redeemer, hope, the friend of the oppressed.

That is what Christianity did; and now, after many years, what have they who destroyed it done? They saw that the poor allowed themselves to be oppressed by the rich, the feeble by the strong, because of that saying: "The rich and the strong will oppress me on earth; but when they wish to enter paradise, I shall be at the door and I will accuse them before the tribunal of God." And so, alas! they were patient.

The antagonists of Christ therefore said to the poor: "You wait patiently for the day of justice: there is no justice; you wait for the life

eternal to achieve your vengeance: there is no life eternal; you gather up your tears and those of your family, the cries of children and the sobs of women, to place them at the feet of God at the hour of death: there is no God."

Then it is certain that the poor man dried his tears, that he told his wife to check her sobs, his children to come with him, and that he stood upon the earth with the power of a bull. He said to the rich: "Thou who oppressest me, thou art only man;" and to the priest: "Thou who hast consoled me, thou hast lied." That was just what the antagonists of Christ desired. Perhaps they thought this was the way to achieve man's happiness, sending him out to the conquest of liberty.

But, if the poor man, once satisfied that the priests deceive him, that the rich rob him, that all men have rights, that all good is of this world, and that misery is impiety; the poor man, believing in himself and in his two arms, says to himself some fine day: "War on the rich! for me, happiness here in this life, since there is no other! for me, the earth, since heaven is empty! for me and for all, since all are equal." Oh! reasoners sublime who have led him to this, what will you say to him if he is conquered?

Doubtless you are philanthropists, doubtless you are right about the future, and the day will come when you will be blessed; but thus far, we

have not blessed you. When the oppressor said: "This world for me!" the oppressed replied: "Heaven for me!" Now what can he say?

All the evils of the present come from two causes: the people who have passed through 1793 and 1814, nurse wounds in their hearts. That which was is no more; what will be, is not yet. Do not seek elsewhere the cause of our malady.

Here is a man whose house falls in ruins; he has torn it down in order to build another. The rubbish encumbers the spot, and he waits for fresh materials for his new home. At the moment he has prepared to cut the stone and mix the cement, while standing, pick in hand, with sleeves rolled up, he is informed that there is no more stone, and is advised to whiten the old material and make the best possible use of that. What can you expect this man to do who is unwilling to build his nest out of ruins? The quarry is deep, the tools too weak to hew out the stones. "Wait!" they say to him, "we will draw out the stones one by one; hope, work, advance, withdraw." What do they not tell him? And in the meantime he has lost his old house, and has not yet built the new; he does not know where to protect himself from the rain, or how to prepare his evening meal, nor where to work, nor where to sleep, nor where to die; and his children are newly born.

I am much deceived if we do not resemble that man. O, people of the future! when on a warm summer day you bend over your plows in the green fields of your native land; when you see, in the pure sunlight under a spotless sky, the earth, your fruitful mother, smiling in her matutinal robe on the workman, her well-beloved child; when drying on your brow the holy baptism of sweat, you cast your eye over the vast horizon, when there will not be one blade higher than another in the human harvest, but only violets and marguerites in the midst of ripening sheafs. Oh! free men! when you thank God that you were born for that harvest, think of those who are no more, tell yourself that we have dearly purchased the repose which you enjoy; pity us more than all your fathers, for we have suffered the evil which entitled them to pity and we have lost that which consoled them.

CHAPTER III

I MUST explain how I was first taken with the malady of the age.

I attended a great supper, after a masquerade. About me my friends richly costumed, on all sides young men and women, all sparkling with beauty and joy; on the right and on the left exquisite dishes, flagons, splendor, flowers; above

my head a fine orchestra, and before me my mistress, a superb creature, whom I idolized.

I was then nineteen; I had experienced no great misfortune, I had suffered from no disease; my character was at once haughty and frank, my heart full of the hopes of youth. The fumes of wine fermented in my head; it was one of those moments of intoxication when all that one sees and hears, speaks to one of the adored. All nature appeared then a beautiful stone with a thousand facets on which was engraven the mysterious name. One would willingly embrace all who smile, and one feels that he is brother of all who live. My mistress had granted me a rendezvous for the night and I was gently raising my glass to my lips while my eyes were fixed on her.

As I turned to take a napkin, my fork fell. I stooped to pick it up, and not finding it at first I raised the table-cloth to see where it had rolled. I then saw under the table my mistress's foot; it rested on that of a young man seated beside her; from time to time they exchanged a gentle pressure.

Perfectly calm, I asked for another fork and continued my supper. My mistress and her neighbor were also, on their side, very quiet, talking but little and never looking at each other. The young man had his elbows on the table and was chatting with another woman who was show-

ing him her necklace and bracelets. My mistress sat motionless, her eyes fixed and filled with languor. I watched both of them during the entire supper and I saw nothing either in their gestures or in their faces that could betray them. Finally, at dessert, I dropped my napkin, and stooping down saw that they were still in the same position.

I had promised to take my mistress to her home that night. She was a widow and therefore quite at liberty, living alone with an old relative who served as chaperon. As I was crossing the hall she called to me:

"Come, Octave!" she said; "here I am, let us go."

I laughed and passed out without replying. After walking a short distance I sat down on a stone projecting from a wall. I do not know what my thoughts were; I sat as though stupefied by the infidelity of that woman of whom I had never been jealous, whom I had never had cause to suspect. What I had seen left no room for doubt, I was stunned as though by a blow from a club. The only thing I remember doing as I sat there, was looking mechanically up at the sky, and, seeing a star spin across the heavens, I saluted that fugitive gleam in which poets see a blasted world and gravely took off my hat to it.

I returned to my home very quietly, experi-

encing nothing, as though deprived of sensation and reflection. I undressed and retired; hardly had my head touched the pillow when the spirit of vengeance seized me with such force that I suddenly sat bolt upright against the wall as though all my muscles were made of wood. I jumped from my bed with a cry of pain; I could walk only on my heels, the nerves in my toes were so irritated. I passed an hour in this way, completely foolish and stiff as a skeleton. It was the first burst of passion I had ever experienced.

The man I had surprised with my mistress was one of my most intimate friends. I went to his house the next day in company with a young lawyer named Desgenais; we took pistols, another witness, and repaired to the woods of Vincennes. On the way I avoided speaking to my adversary or even approaching him; thus I resisted the temptation to insult or strike him, a useless form of violence at a time when the law recognized the code. But I could not remove my eyes from him. He was the companion of my childhood and we had lived in the closest intimacy for many years. He understood perfectly my love for my mistress and had several times intimated that bonds of this kind were sacred to a friend, and that he would be incapable of an attempt to supplant me even if he loved the same woman. In short, I had perfect confidence in him and I had perhaps never

pressed the hand of any human creature more cordially than his.

My glance was eager and curious as I scrutinized this man whom I had heard speak of love as an antique hero and whom I had caught caressing my mistress. It was the first time in my life I had seen a monster; I measured him with a haggard eye to see how he was made. He whom I had known since he was ten years old, with whom I had lived in the most perfect friendship, it seemed to me I had never seen him. Allow me a comparison.

There is a Spanish play, familiar to all the world, in which a stone statue comes to sup with a *debauchee,* sent thither by divine justice. The *debauchee* puts a good face on the matter and forces himself to affect indifference; but the statue asks for his hand, and when he has extended it he feels himself seized by a mortal chill and falls in convulsions.

Whenever I have loved and confided in any one, either friend or mistress, and suddenly discover that I have been deceived, I can only describe the effect produced on me by comparing it to the clasp of that marble hand. It is the actual impression of marble, it is as though a man of stone had kissed me. Alas! this horrible apparition has knocked more than once at my door; more than once we have supped together.

When the arrangements were all made we

placed ourselves in line, facing each other and slowly advancing. My adversary fired the first shot, wounding me in the right arm. I immediately seized my pistol in the other hand; but my strength failed, I could not raise it; I fell on one knee.

Then I saw my enemy running up to me with an expression of great anxiety on his face, and very pale. My seconds hastened to my side, seeing that I was wounded; but he pushed them aside and seized my wounded arm. His teeth were set and I could see that he was suffering intense anguish. His agony was the most frightful that man can experience.

"Go!" he cried, "go dress your wound at the house of——"

He choked, and so did I.

I was placed in a cab where I found a physician. My wound was not dangerous, the bone being untouched, but I was in such a state of excitation that it was impossible to properly dress my wound. As they were about to drive from the field I saw a trembling hand at the door of my cab; it was my adversary. I shook my head in reply; I was in such a rage that I could not pardon him, although I felt that his repentance was sincere.

By the time I reached home I had lost much blood and felt relieved, for feebleness saved me from the force of anger which was doing me

more harm than my wound. I willingly retired to my bed and called for a glass of water, which I quickly swallowed with relish.

But I was soon attacked by fever. It was then I began to shed tears. I could understand that my mistress had ceased to love me, but not that she could deceive me. I could not comprehend why a woman who was forced to it by neither duty nor interest could lie to one man when she loved another. Twenty times a day I asked my friend Desgenais how that could be possible.

" If I were her husband," I said, " or if I supported her I could easily understand how she might be tempted to deceive me; but if she no longer loves me, why deceive me? "

I did not understand how any one could lie for love; I was but a child then, but I confess that I do not understand it yet. Every time I have loved a woman I have told her of it, and when I ceased to love her I confessed it to her with the same sincerity, having always thought that in matters of this kind the will was not concerned and that there was no crime but falsehood.

To all this Desgenais replied:

" She is unworthy; promise me that you will never see her again."

I solemnly promised. He advised me, moreover, not to write to her, not even to reproach her, and if she wrote to me not to reply. I

promised all that with some surprise that he should consider it necessary to exact such a promise.

Nevertheless the first thing I did when I was able to leave my room was to visit my mistress. I found her alone, seated in the corner of the room with an expression of sorrow on her face and an appearance of general disorder in her surroundings. I overwhelmed her with violent reproaches; I was intoxicated with despair. In a paroxysm of grief I fell on the bed and gave free course to my tears.

"Ah! faithless one! wretch!" I cried between my sobs, "you knew that it would kill me. Did the prospect please you? What have I done to you?"

She threw her arms around my neck, saying that she had been seduced, that my rival had intoxicated her at that fatal supper, but that she had never been his; that she had abandoned herself in a moment of forgetfulness; that she had committed a fault but not a crime; but that if I would not pardon her, she, too, would die. All that sincere repentance has of tears, all that sorrow has of eloquence, she exhausted to console me; pale and distressed, her dress deranged and her hair falling over her shoulders she kneeled in the middle of her chamber; never have I seen anything so beautiful and I shuddered with horror as my senses revolted at the sight.

I went away crushed, scarcely able to direct my tottering steps. I wished never to see her again; but in a quarter of an hour I returned. I do not know what desperate resolve I had formed; I experienced a dull desire to possess her once more, to drain the cup of tears and bitterness to the dregs and then to die with her. In short, I abhorred her and I idolized her; I felt that her love was my ruin, but that to live without her was impossible. I mounted the stairs like a flash; I spoke to none of the servants, but, familiar with the house, opened the door of her chamber.

I found her seated calmly before her toilet-table, covered with jewels; she held in her hand a piece of crêpe which she passed gently over her cheeks. I thought I was dreaming; it did not seem possible that this was the woman I had left, just fifteen minutes before, overwhelmed with grief, abased to the floor; I was as motionless as a statue. She, hearing the door open, turned her head and smiled:

"Is it you?" she said.

She was going to the ball and was expecting my rival. As she recognized me, she compressed her lips and frowned.

I started to leave the room. I looked at her bare neck, lithe and perfumed, on which rested her knotted hair confined by a jeweled comb; that neck, the seat of vital force, was blacker

than Hades; two shining tresses had fallen there and some light silvern hairs balanced above it. Her shoulders and neck, whiter than milk, displayed a heavy growth of down. There was in that knotted head of hair something indescribably immodest which seemed to mock me when I thought of the disorder in which I had seen her a moment before. I suddenly stepped up to her and struck that neck with the back of my hand. My mistress gave vent to a cry of terror, and fell on her hands, while I hastened from the room.

When I reached my room I was again attacked by fever and was obliged to take to my bed. My wound had reopened and I suffered great pain. Desgenais came to see me and I told him what had happened. He listened in silence, then paced up and down the room as though undecided as to his course. Finally he stopped before my bed and burst out laughing.

"Is she your first mistress?" he asked.

"No!" I replied, "she is my last."

Toward midnight, while sleeping restlessly, I seemed to hear in my dreams a profound sigh. I opened my eyes and saw my mistress standing near my bed with arms crossed, looking like a specter. I could not restrain a cry of fright, believing it to be an apparition conjured up by my diseased brain. I leaped from my bed and

fled to the farther end of the room; but she followed me.

"It is I!" said she; putting her arms around me she drew me to her.

"What do you want of me?" I cried. "Leave me! I fear I shall kill you!"

"Very well, kill me!" she said. "I have deceived you, I have lied to you, I am an infamous wretch and I am miserable; but I love you, and I can not live without you."

I looked at her; how beautiful she was! Her body was quivering; her eyes languid with love and moist with voluptuousness; her bosom was bare, her lips burning. I raised her in my arms.

"Very well," I said, "but before God who sees us, by the soul of my father, I swear that I will kill you and that I will die with you."

I took a knife from the table and placed it under the pillow.

"Come, Octave," she said, smiling and kissing me, "do not be foolish. Come, my dear, all these horrors have unsettled your mind; you are feverish. Give me that knife."

I saw that she wished to take it.

"Listen to me," I then said; "I do not know what comedy you are playing, but as for me I am in earnest. I have loved you as only a man can love and to my sorrow I love you still. You have just told me that you love me, and I hope it is true; but, by all that is sacred, if I am your

lover to-night, no one shall take my place to-morrow. Before God, before God," I repeated, "I would not take you back as my mistress, for I hate you as much as I love you. Before God, if you consent to stay here to-night I will kill you in the morning."

When I had spoken these words I fell into a delirium. She threw her cloak over her shoulders and fled from the room.

When I told Desgenais about it he said:

"Why did you do that? You must be very much disgusted, for she is a beautiful woman."

"Are you joking?" I asked. "Do you think such a woman could be my mistress? Do you think I would ever consent to share her with another? Do you know that she confesses that another possesses her and do you expect me, loving her as I do, to share my love? If that is the way you love, I pity you."

Desgenais replied that he was not so particular.

"My dear Octave," he added, "you are very young. You want many things, beautiful things, which do not exist. You believe in a singular sort of love; perhaps you are capable of it; I believe you are, but I do not envy you. You will have other mistresses, my friend, and you will live to regret what happened last night. If that woman came to you it is certain that she loved you; perhaps she does not love you at this moment, indeed she may be in the arms of an-

other; but she loved you last night in that room; and what should you care for the rest? You will regret it, believe me, for she will not come again. A woman pardons everything except such a slight. Her love for you must have been something terrible when she came to you knowing and confessing herself guilty, risking rebuff and contempt at your hands. Believe me, you will regret it, for I am satisfied that you will soon be cured."

There was such an air of simple conviction about my friend's words, such a despairing certainty based on experience, that I shuddered as I listened. While he was speaking I felt a strong desire to go to my mistress, or to write to her to come to me. I was so weak that I could not leave my bed and that saved me from the shame of finding her waiting for my rival or perhaps in his company. But I could write to her; in spite of myself I doubted whether she would come if I should write.

When Desgenais left me I became so desperate that I resolved to put an end to my trouble. After a terrible struggle horror got the better of love. I wrote my mistress that I would never see her again and begged her not to try to see me unless she wished to be exposed to the shame of being refused admittance. I called a servant and ordered him to deliver the letter at once. He had hardly closed the door when I called him

back. He did not hear me; I did not dare call again; covering my face with my hands I yielded to an overwhelming sense of despair.

CHAPTER IV

THE following morning the first question that occurred to my mind was: "What shall I do?"

I had no occupation. I had studied medicine and law without being able to decide on either of the two professions; I had worked for a banker for six months and my services were so unsatisfactory that I was obliged to resign to avoid being discharged. My studies had been varied but superficial; my memory was active but not retentive.

My only treasure after love, was independence. In my childhood I had devoted myself to a morose cult, and had, so to speak, consecrated my heart to it. One day my father, solicitous about my future, spoke to me of several careers between which he allowed me to choose. I was leaning on the window-sill, looking at a solitary poplar-tree that was swaying in the breeze down in the garden. I thought over all the various occupations and wondered which one I should choose. I turned them all over, one after another, in my mind, and then not feeling inclined to any of them I allowed my thoughts to wan-

der. Suddenly it seemed to me that I felt the earth move and that a secret invisible force was slowly dragging me into space and becoming tangible to my senses; I saw it mount into the sky; I seemed to be on a ship; the poplar near my window resembled a mast; I arose, stretched out my arms, and cried:

" It is little enough to be a passenger for one day on this ship floating through space; it is little enough to be a man, a black point on that ship; I will be a man but not any particular kind of man."

Such was the first vow that, at the age of fourteen, I pronounced in the face of nature, and since then I have tried to do nothing except in obedience to my father, never being able to overcome my repugnance.

I was therefore free, not through indolence but by choice; loving, moreover, all that God had made and very little that man had made. Of life I knew nothing but love, of the world only my mistress, and I did not care to know anything more. So falling in love upon leaving college I sincerely believed that it was for life and every other thought disappeared.

My life was sedentary. I was accustomed to pass the day with my mistress; my greatest pleasure was to lead her through the fields on beautiful summer days, the sight of nature in her splendor having ever been for me the most

powerful incentive to love. In winter, as she enjoyed society, we attended numerous balls and masquerades, and because I thought of no one but her I fondly imagined her equally true to me.

To give you an idea of my state of mind I can not do better than compare it to one of those rooms such as we see in these days where are collected and confounded all the furniture of all times and all countries. Our age has no form of its own. We have impressed the seal of our time on neither our houses nor our gardens nor anything that is ours. On the street may be seen men who have their beards cut as in the time of Henry III, others who are clean shaven, others who have their hair arranged as in the time of Raphael, others as in the time of Christ. So the homes of the rich are cabinets of curiosities: the antique, the Gothic, the taste of the Renaissance, that of Louis XIII, all pell-mell. In short, we have every century except our own—a thing which has never been seen at any other epoch: eclecticism is our taste; we take everything we find, this for beauty, that for utility, this other for antiquity, such another for its ugliness even, so that we live surrounded by débris as though the end of the world were at hand.

Such was the state of my mind; I had read much; moreover I had learned to paint. I knew

by heart a great many things, but nothing in order, so that my head was like a sponge, swollen but empty. I fell in love with all the poets one after another; but being of an impressionable nature the last comer always disgusted me with the rest. I had made of myself a great warehouse of ruins, so that having no more thirst after drinking of the novel and the unknown, I became a ruin myself.

Nevertheless, about that ruin there was still something of youth: it was the hope of my heart which was still childlike.

That hope, which nothing had withered or corrupted and that love had exalted to excess, had now received a mortal wound. The perfidy of my mistress had struck deep, and when I thought of it, I felt in my soul a swooning away, a convulsive flutter as of a wounded bird in agony.

Society which works so much evil is like that serpent of the Indies whose dwelling is the leaf of a plant which cures its sting; it presents, in nearly every case, the remedy by the side of the suffering it has caused. For example, the man whose life is one of routine, who has his business cares to claim his attention upon rising, visits at such an hour, loves at another, can lose his mistress and suffer no evil effects. His occupations and his thoughts are like impassive soldiers ranged in line of battle; a single shot strikes one

down, his neighbors fill up the gap and the line is intact.

I had not that resource since I was alone: nature, the kind mother, seemed, on the contrary, more vast and more empty than ever. If I had been able to forget my mistress I would have been saved. How many there are who can be cured with even less than that. Such men are incapable of loving a faithless woman and their conduct, under the circumstances, is admirable in its firmness. But is it thus that one loves at nineteen when, knowing nothing of the world, desiring everything, the young man feels within him the germ of all the passions? On the right, on the left, below, on the horizon, everywhere some voice which calls him. All is desire, all is reverie. There is no reality which holds him when the heart is young; there is no oak so gnarled that it may not give birth to a dryad; and if one had a hundred arms one need not fear to open them; one has but to clasp his mistress and all is well.

As for me I did not understand what else there was to do besides love, and when any one spoke to me of another occupation I did not reply. My passion for my mistress had something fierce about it, as all my life had been severely monachal. I wish to cite a single example. She gave me her portrait in miniature in a medallion; I wore it over my heart, a practise much affected

by men; but one day while idly rummaging about a shop filled with curiosities I found an iron "discipline whip," such as was used by the mediæval flagellants; at the end of this whip was a metal plate bristling with sharp iron points; I had the medallion riveted to this plate and then returned it to its place over my heart. The sharp points pierced my bosom with every movement and caused such a strange voluptuous anguish that I sometimes pressed it down with my hand in order to intensify the sensation. I knew very well that I was committing folly; love is responsible for many others.

When that woman deceived me I removed the cruel medallion. I can not tell with what sadness I detached that iron girdle and what a sigh escaped me when it was gone.

"Ah! poor wounds!" I said, "you will soon heal, but what balm is there for that other deeper wound?"

I had reason to hate that woman, she was, so to speak, mingled with the blood of my veins; I cursed her but I dreamed of her. What could I do with a dream? By what effort of the will could I drown memory of flesh and blood? Macbeth having killed Duncan saw that the ocean would not wash his hands clean again; it would not have washed away my wounds. I said to Desgenais: "When I sleep, her head is on my pillow."

My life had been wrapped up in that woman; to doubt her was to doubt all; to deny her, to curse all; to lose her, to renounce all. I no longer went out; the world seemed to be peopled with monsters, with horned deer and crocodiles. To all that was said to distract my mind I replied:

"Yes, that is all very well, but you may rest assured I shall do nothing of the kind."

I sat in my window and said:

"She will come, I am sure of it, she is coming, she is turning the corner at this moment, I can feel her approach. She can no more live without me than I without her. What shall I say? How shall I receive her?"

Then the thought of her perfidy recurred to me.

"Ah! let her come! I will kill her!"

Since my last letter I had heard nothing of her.

"What is she doing?" I asked myself. "She loves another? Then I will love another also. Whom shall I love?"

While casting about I heard a far distant voice crying:

"Thou, love another? Two beings who love, who embrace, and who are not thou and I! Is such a thing possible? Are you a fool?"

"Coward!" said Desgenais, "when will you forget that woman? Is she such a great loss? Take the first comer and console yourself."

"No," I replied, "it is not such a great loss. Have I not done what I ought? Have I not driven her away from here? What have you to say to that? The rest concerns me; the bull wounded in the arena is at liberty to go to sleep in a corner with the sword of the matador in his shoulder, and die in peace. What can I do, tell me? What do you mean by first comer? You will show me a cloudless sky, trees and houses, men who talk, drink, sing, women who dance and horses that gallop. All that is not life, it is the noise of life. Go, go, leave me in peace."

CHAPTER V

When Desgenais saw that my despondency was incurable, that I would neither listen to any advice nor leave my room, he took the matter seriously. I saw him enter one evening with an expression of gravity on his face; he spoke of my mistress and continued in his tone of sadness, saying all manner of evil of women. While he was speaking I was leaning on my elbow, and, rising in my bed, I listened attentively.

It was one of those somber evenings when the sighing of the wind resembles the moans of a dying man; a storm was brewing, and between the splashes of rain on the windows there was the silence of death. All nature suffers in such mo-

ments; the trees writhe in pain and twist their heads; the birds of the fields cower under the bushes; the streets of cities are deserted. I was suffering from my wound. But a short time before I had a mistress and a friend. The mistress had deceived me and the friend had stretched me on a bed of pain. I could not clearly distinguish what was passing in my head; it seemed to me that I was under the influence of a horrible dream and that I had but to awake to find myself cured; at times it seemed that my entire life had been a dream, ridiculous and childish, the falseness of which had just been disclosed. Desgenais was seated near the lamp at my side; he was firm and serious, although a smile hovered about his lips. He was a man of heart, but as dry as a pumice-stone. An early experience had made him bald before his time; he knew life and had suffered; but his grief was a cuirass; he was a materialist and he waited for death.

"Octave," he said, "after what has happened to you I see that you believe in love such as the poets and romancers have represented; in a word, you believe in what is said here below and not in what is done. That is because you do not reason soundly and it may lead you into great misfortune.

"The poets represent love as the sculptors design beauty, as the musicians create melody;

that is to say, endowed with an exquisite nervous organization, they gather up with discerning ardor the purest elements of life, the most beautiful lines of matter, and the most harmonious voices of nature. There was, it is said, at Athens a great number of beautiful girls; Praxiteles designed them all, one after another; then from all these diverse types of beauty, each one of which had its defects, he formed a single faultless beauty and created Venus. The first man who created a musical instrument and who gave to that art its rules and its laws, had for a long time listened to the murmuring of reeds and the singing of birds. Thus the poets who understand life, after having known much of love, more or less transitory, after having felt that sublime exaltation which passion can for the moment inspire, deducting from human nature all elements which degrade it, created the mysterious names which through the ages are passed from lip to lip: Daphne and Chloe, Hero and Leander, Pyramus and Thisbe.

"To try to find in real life such love as this, eternal and absolute, is the same thing as to seek on the public squares such a woman as Venus or to expect nightingales to sing the symphonies of Beethoven.

"Perfection does not exist; to comprehend it is the triumph of human intelligence; to desire to possess it, the most dangerous of follies.

Open your window, Octave; do you not see the infinite? You try to form some idea of a thing that has no limits, you who were born yesterday and who will die to-morrow? This spectacle of immensity in every country in the world, produces the wildest illusions. Religions are born of it; it was to possess the infinite that Cato cut his throat, that the Christians delivered themselves to lions, the Huguenots to the Catholics; all the people of the earth have stretched out their hands to that immensity and have longed to plunge into it. The fool wishes to possess heaven; the sage admires it, kneels before it, but does not desire it.

" Perfection, my friend, is no more made for us than infinity. We must seek for nothing in it, demand nothing of it, neither love nor beauty, happiness nor virtue; but we must love it if we would be virtuous, if we would attain the greatest happiness of which man is capable.

" Let us suppose you have in your study a picture by Raphael that you consider perfect; let us suppose that upon a close examination you discover in one of the figures a gross defect of design, a limb distorted, or a muscle that belies nature, such as has been discovered, they say, in one of the arms of an antique gladiator; you would experience a feeling of displeasure, but you would not throw that picture in the fire; you would merely say that it is not perfect but

that it has qualities that are worthy of admiration.

"There are women whose natural singleness of heart and sincerity are such that they could not have two lovers at the same time. You believed your mistress such a one; that is best, I admit. You have discovered that she has deceived you; does that oblige you to despise and to abuse her, to believe her deserving of your hatred?

"Even if your mistress had never deceived you, even if at this moment she loved none other than you, think, Octave, how far her love would still be from perfection, how human it would be, how small, how restrained by the hypocrisies and conventionalities of the world; remember that another man possessed her before you, that many others will possess her after you.

"Reflect: what drives you at this moment to despair is the idea of perfection in your mistress, the idea that has been shattered. But when you understand that the first idea itself was human, small and restricted, you will see that it is little more than a round in the rotten ladder of human imperfection.

"I think you will readily admit that your mistress has had other admirers and that she will have still others in the future; you will doubtless reply that it matters little, so long as she loved you. But I ask you, since she has had

others, what difference does it make whether it was yesterday or two years ago? Since she loves but one at a time what does it matter whether it is during an interval of two years or the course of a single night? Are you a man, Octave? Do you see the leaves falling from the trees, the sun rising and setting? Do you hear the ticking of the clock of time with each pulsation of your heart? Is there, then, such a difference between the love of a year and the love of an hour? I challenge you to answer that, you fool, as you sit there looking out at the infinite through a window not larger than your hand.

"You consider that woman faithful who loves you two years; you must have an almanac that will indicate just how long it takes for an honest man's kisses to dry on a woman's lips. You make a distinction between the woman who sells herself for money and the one who gives herself for pleasure, between the one who gives herself through pride and the one who gives herself through devotion. Among women who are for sale, some cost more than others; among those who are sought for pleasure some inspire more confidence than others; and among those who are worthy of devotion there are some who receive a third of a man's heart, others a quarter, others a half, depending upon her education, her manner, her name, her birth, her beauty, her temperament, according to the occasion, according

to what is said, according to the time, according to what you have had to drink for dinner.

"You love women, Octave, because you are young, ardent, because your features are regular and your hair dark and glossy, but you do not, for all that, understand woman.

"Nature, having all, desires the reproduction of beings; everywhere, from the summit of the mountain to the bottom of the sea, life is opposed to death. God, to conserve the work of his hands, has established this law that the greatest pleasure of all loving beings shall be the act of generation.

"Oh! my friend, when you feel bursting on your lips the vow of eternal love, do not be afraid to yield, but do not confound wine with intoxication; do not think the cup divine because the draft is of celestial flavor; do not be astonished to find it broken and empty in the evening. It is but woman, it is a fragile vase, made of earth by a potter.

"Thank God for giving you a glimpse of heaven, but do not imagine yourself a bird because you can flap your wings. The birds themselves can not escape the clouds; there is a sphere where air fails them and the lark rising with its song into the morning fog, sometimes falls back dead in the field.

"Take love as a sober man takes wine; do not become a drunkard. If your mistress is sincere

and faithful, love her for that; but if she is not, if she is merely young and beautiful, love her for that; if she is agreeable and spirituelle, love her for that; if she is none of these things but merely loves you, love her for that. Love does not come to us every day.

"Do not tear your hair and stab yourself because you have a rival. You say that your mistress deceives you for another; it is your pride that suffers; but change the words, say that it is for you that she deceives him, and behold you are happy.

"Do not make a rule of conduct and do not say that you wish to be loved exclusively, for in saying that, as you are a man and inconstant yourself, you are forced to add tacitly: 'As far as possible.'

"Take time as it comes, the wind as it blows, woman as she is. The Spaniards first, among women, love faithfully; their heart is sincere and violent, but they wear a dagger just above it. Italian women are lascivious. The English are exalted and melancholy, cold and unnatural. The German women are tender and sweet, but colorless and monotonous. The French are spirituelle, elegant, and voluptuous, but they lie like demons.

"Above all, do not accuse women of being what they are; we have made them thus, undoing the work of nature.

"Nature, who thinks of everything, made the virgin for love; but with her first child her bosom loses its form, her beauty its freshness. Woman is made for motherhood. Man would perhaps abandon her, disgusted by the loss of beauty; but his child clings to him and weeps. Behold the family, the human law; everything that departs from this law is monstrous.

"Civilization thwarts the ends of nature. In our cities, according to our customs, the virgin destined by nature for the open air, made to bask in the sunlight, to admire the nude wrestlers, as in Lacedemonia, to choose, and to love, is shut up in close confinement and bolted in; yet she hides romance under her cross; pale and idle she fades away and loses in the silence of the nights that beauty that stifles her and which has need of the open air. Then she is suddenly taken from this solitude, knowing nothing, loving nothing, desiring everything; an old woman instructs her, a mysterious word is whispered in her ear, and she is thrown into the arms of a stranger. There you have marriage—that is to say, the civilized family. A child is born. This poor creature has lost her beauty and she has never loved. The child is brought to her with the words: 'You are a mother.' She replies: 'I am not a mother; take that child to some woman who can nurse it. I can not.' Her husband tells her that she is right, that her child would be disgusted with

her. She receives careful attention and is soon cured of the disease of maternity. A month later she may be seen at the Tuileries, at the ball, at the opera: her child is at Chaillot, at Auxerre; her husband with another woman. Then young men speak to her of love, of devotion, of sympathy, of all that is in the heart. She takes one, draws him to her bosom; he dishonors her and returns to the Bourse. She cries all night, but discovers that tears make her eyes red. She takes a consoler, for the loss of whom another consoles her; thus up to the age of thirty or more. Then, blasé and corrupted, with no human sentiment, not even disgust, she meets a fine youth with raven locks, ardent eye and hopeful heart; she recalls her own youth, she remembers what she has suffered, and telling him the story of her life, she teaches him to shun love.

"That is woman as we have made her; such are your mistresses. But you say they are women and there is something good in them!

"But if your character is formed, if you are truly a man, sure of yourself and confident of your strength, you may taste of life without fear and without reserve; you may be sad or joyous, deceived or respected; but be sure you are loved, for what matters the rest?

"If you are mediocre and ordinary, I advise you to consider your course very carefully before

deciding, but do not expect too much of your mistress.

" If you are weak, dependent upon others, inclined to allow yourself to be dominated by opinion, to take root wherever you see a little soil, make for yourself a shield that will resist everything, for if you yield to your weaker nature you will not grow, you will dry up like a dead plant, and you will bear neither fruit nor flowers. The sap of your life will dissipate into the formation of a useless bark; all your actions will be as colorless as the leaves of the willow; you will have no tears to water you, but those from your own eyes, to nourish you, no heart but your own.

" But if you are of exalted nature, believing in dreams and wishing to realize them, I say to you plainly. Love does not exist.

" For to love is to give body and soul, or, better, it is to make a single being of two; it is to walk in the sunlight, in the open air through the boundless prairies with a body having four arms, two heads and two hearts. Love is faith, it is the religion of earthly happiness, it is a luminous triangle suspended in the temple of the world. To love is to walk freely through that temple and to have at your side a being capable of understanding why a thought, a word, a flower makes you pause and raise your eyes to that celestial triangle. To exercise the noble faculties of man is a great good, and that is why genius is

glorious; but to double those faculties, to place a heart and an intelligence upon a heart and an intelligence—that is supreme happiness. God has nothing better for man; that is why love is better than genius. But tell me, is that the love of our women? No, no, it must be admitted. Love, for them, is another thing; it is to go out veiled, to write in secret, to make trembling advances, to heave chaste sighs under a starched and unnatural robe, then to draw bolts and throw it aside, to humiliate a rival, to deceive a husband, to render a lover desolate; to love, for our women, is to play at lying, as children play at hide and seek, the hideous debauchee of a heart, worse than all the lubricity of the Romans, or the Saturnalia of Priapus; bastard parody of vice itself as well as of virtue; loathsome comedy where all is whispering and oblique glances, where all is small, elegant and deformed like the porcelain monsters brought from China; lamentable derision of all that is beautiful and ugly, divine and infernal; a shadow without a body, a skeleton of all that God has made."

Thus spoke Desgenais; and the shadows of night began to fall.

CHAPTER VI

THE next morning I rode through the *Bois de Boulogne;* the day was dark and threatening. At the *Porte Maillot* I dropped the reins on the back of my horse and abandoned myself to reverie, revolving in my mind the words spoken by Desgenais the evening before.

Suddenly I heard my name called. Turning my head I spied one of my mistress's most intimate friends in an open carriage. She called to me to stop, and, holding out her hand with a friendly air, invited me to dine with her if I had no other engagement.

This woman, Madame Levasseur by name, was small, stout, and decidedly blonde; I had never liked her and my attitude toward her had always been one of studied politeness. But I could not resist a desire to accept her invitation; I pressed her hand and thanked her; I was sure we would talk of my mistress.

She sent a servant to lead my horse and I entered her carriage; she was alone and we at once took the road to Paris. Rain began to fall, and the carriage curtains were drawn; thus shut up together we rode on in silence. I looked at her with inexpressible sadness; she was not only the friend of my faithless one but her confidante. She had often formed one of our party when I

called on my mistress in the evening! With what impatience had I endured her presence. How often I counted the minutes that must elapse before she would leave! That was probably the cause of my aversion for her. I knew that she approved of our love; she even went so far as to defend me in our quarrels. In spite of the services she had rendered me, I considered her ugly and tiresome. Alas! now I found her beautiful! I looked at her hands, her clothes; every gesture went straight to my heart; all the past was associated with her. She noticed the change in manner and understood that I was oppressed by sad memories of the past. Thus we rode on our way, I looking at her; she smiling at me. When we reached Paris she took my hand:

"Well?" she said.

"Well?" I replied, sobbing, "tell her if you wish." Tears rushed from my eyes.

After dinner we sat before the fire.

"But tell me," she said, "is it irrevocable? Can nothing be done?"

"Alas! madame," I replied, "there is nothing irrevocable except the grief that is killing me. My condition can be expressed in a few words: I can not love her, I can not love another, and I can not cease loving."

At these words she moved uneasily in her chair and I could see an expression of compassion on her face. For some time she seemed to be re-

flecting, as though pondering over my fate and seeking some remedy for my sorrow. Her eyes were closed and she appeared lost in reverie. She extended her hand and I took it in mine.

"And I, too," she murmured, "that is just my experience." She stopped, overcome by emotion.

Of all the sisters of love, the most beautiful is pity. I held Madame Levasseur's hand as she began to speak of my mistress, saying all she could think of in her favor. My sadness increased. What could I reply? Finally she came to speak of herself.

Not long since, she said, a man who loved her had abandoned her. She had made great sacrifices for him; her fortune was compromised as well as her honor and her name. Her husband, whom she knew to be vindictive, had made threats. Her tears flowed as she continued, and I began to forget my own sorrow in my sympathy for her. She had been married against her will; she struggled a long time; but she regretted nothing except that she had not been able to inspire a more sincere affection. I believe she even accused herself because she had not been able to hold her lover's heart, and because she had been guilty of apparent indifference.

When she had unburdened her heart she became silent.

"Madame," I said, "it was not chance that brought about our meeting in the *Bois de Bou-*

logne. I believe that human sorrows are but wandering sisters and that some good angel unites the trembling hands that are stretched out for aid. Do not repent having told me your sorrow. The secret you have confided to me is only a tear which has fallen from your eye, but has rested on my heart. Permit me to come again and let us suffer together."

Such lively sympathy took possession of me that without reflection I kissed her; it did not occur to my mind that it could offend her and she did not appear even to notice it.

Our conversation continued in this tone of great friendship. She told me her sorrows, I told her mine, and between those two experiences which touched each other, I felt arise a sweetness, as of a celestial accord born of two voices in anguish. All this time I had seen nothing but her face. Suddenly I noticed that her dress was in disorder. It appeared singular to me that, seeing my embarrassment, she did not rearrange it, and I turned my head to give her an opportunity. She did nothing. Finally meeting her eyes and seeing that she was perfectly aware of the state she was in, I felt as though I had been struck by a thunderbolt, for I clearly understood that I was the plaything of her monstrous effrontery, that grief itself was for her but a means of seducing the senses. I took my hat without a word, bowed profoundly and left the room.

CHAPTER VII

Upon returning to my apartments I found a large box in the center of the room. One of my aunts had died and I was one of the heirs to her fortune, which was not large. The box contained, among other things, a number of musty old books. Not knowing what to do and being affected with ennui, I began to read one of them. They were for the most part romances of the time of Louis XV; my pious aunt had probably inherited them herself and never read them, for they were, so to speak, catechisms of vice.

I was singularly disposed to reflect on everything that came to my notice, to give everything a mental and moral significance; I treated events as pearls in a necklace which I tried to string together.

It struck me that there was something significant about the arrival of these books at this time. I devoured them with a bitterness and a sadness born of despair. "Yes, you are right," I said to myself, "you alone possess the secret of life, you alone dare to say that nothing is true and real but debauchery, hypocrisy and corruption. Be my friends, throw on the wound in my soul your corrosive poisons, teach me to believe in you."

While buried in these shadows I allowed my

favorite poets and text-books to accumulate dust. I even ground them under my feet in excess of wrath. "You wretched dreamers," I said to them; "you who teach me only suffering, miserable shufflers of words, charlatans if you knew the truth, fools if you speak in good faith, liars in either case, who make fairy tales of the human heart, I will burn every one of you!"

Then tears came to my aid and I perceived that there was nothing real but my grief. "Very well," I cried, in my delirium, "tell me, good and bad *genii,* counsellors for good or evil, tell me what to do! Choose an arbiter and let him speak."

I seized an old Bible which lay on my table and read the first passage that caught my eye.

"Reply to me, thou book of God," I said, "what word have you for me?" My eye fell on this passage in Ecclesiastes, chapter ix:

I pondered all these things in my heart, and I sought diligently for wisdom. There are just and wise men and their works are in the hands of God; nevertheless man does not know whether he is worthy of love or hatred.

And the future is unknown, for there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and him that sacrificeth not. The righteous is treated as the sinner and the perjurer as him who speaks the truth.

There is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, and there is one event to all. Therefore the hearts of the children of men are full of evil and madness while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

When I read these words I was astounded; I did not know that there was such a sentiment in the Bible. " And thou, too, as all others, thou book of hope! "

What do the astronomers think when they predict at a given hour and place the passage of a comet, that most eccentric of celestial travelers? What do the naturalists think when they reveal the myriad forms of life concealed in a drop of water? Do they think they have invented what they see and that their microscopes and lenses make the law of nature? What did the first lawgiver think when, seeking for the corner-stone in the social edifice, angered doubtless by some idle importunity, he struck the tables of brass and felt in his bowels the yearning for a law of retaliation? Did he then invent justice? And the first who plucked the fruit planted by his neighbor and who fled cowering under his mantle, did he invent shame? And he who, having overtaken that same thief who had robbed him of the product of his toil, forgave him his sin, and instead of raising his hand to smite him, said, " Sit thou down and eat thy fill " ; when after having thus returned good

for evil he raised his eyes toward Heaven and felt his heart quivering, tears welling from his eyes, and his knees bending to the earth, did he invent virtue? Oh! Heaven! here is a woman who speaks of love and who deceives me, here is a man who speaks of friendship, and who counsels me to seek consolation in debauchery; here is another woman who weeps and would console me with the flesh; here is a Bible that speaks of God and says: "Perhaps; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked."

I ran to the open window: "Is it true that you are empty?" I cried, looking up at the pale expanse of sky which spread above me. "Reply, reply! Before I die grant that I may clasp in these arms of mine something more than a dream!"

Profound silence reigned. As I stood with arms outstretched, eyes lost in space, a swallow uttered a plaintive cry; in spite of myself I followed it with my eyes; while the swallow disappeared from sight like a flash, a little girl passed, singing.

CHAPTER VIII

YET I was not willing to yield. Before taking life on its pleasant side after having seen its evil side so dearly, I resolved to test everything. I

remained thus for some time a prey to countless sorrows, tormented by terrible dreams.

The great obstacle to my cure was my youth. Wherever I happened to be, whatever my occupation, I could think of nothing but women; the sight of a woman made me tremble.

I had been so fortunate as to give to love my virginity. But the result of this was that all my senses were united in the idea of love; there was the cause of my unhappiness. For not being able to think of anything but women, I could not help turning over in my head, day and night, all the ideas of debauchery, of false love and of feminine treason with which my mind was filled. To possess a woman was for me to love her; for I thought of nothing but women and I did not believe in the possibility of true love.

All this suffering inspired me with a sort of rage, and at times I was tempted to imitate the monks and murder myself in order to conquer my senses; at times I felt like going out into the street and throwing myself at the feet of the first woman I met and vowing eternal love.

God is my witness that I did all in my power to cure myself. Preoccupied from the first with the idea that the society of men was the haunt of vice and hypocrisy, where all were like my mistress, I resolved to separate myself from them and live in complete isolation. I resumed my neglected studies, I plunged into history,

poetry, and anatomy. There happened to be on the fourth floor of the same house an old German who was well versed in lore. I determined to learn his tongue; the German was poor and friendless and willingly accepted the task of instructing me. My perpetual state of distraction worried him. How many times seated near him with a smoking lamp between us, he waited in patient astonishment while I sat with my arms crossed on my book, lost in reverie, oblivious of his presence and of his pity.

" My dear sir," said I to him one day, " all this is useless, but you are the best of men. What a task you have undertaken! You must leave me to my fate; we can do nothing, neither you nor I."

I do not know that he understood my meaning, but he grasped my hand and there was no more talk of German.

I soon realized that solitude instead of curing me was doing me harm, and so completely changed my system. I went to the country and galloped through the woods with the huntsmen; I rode until I was out of breath, I tried to break myself with fatigue, and when after a day of sweat in the fields, I reached my bed in the evening smelling of powder and the stable, I buried my head in the pillow, I rolled about under the covers and I cried: " Fantom, fan-

tom! are you not tired? Will you leave me for one night?"

But why these vain efforts? Solitude sent me to nature, and nature to love. When I stood in the street of Observation I saw myself surrounded by corpses, and, drying my hands on my bloody apron, stifled by the odor of putrefaction, I turned my head in spite of myself, and I saw floating before my eyes green harvests, balmy fields and the pensive harmony of the evening. "No," I said, "science can not console me; I can not plunge into dead nature, I would die there myself and float about like a livid corpse amidst the débris of shattered hopes. I would not cure myself of my youth; I will live where there is life, or I will at least die in the sun." I began to mingle with the throngs at Sèvres and Chaville; I lay down in the midst of a flowery dale, in a secluded part of Chaville. Alas! all these forests and prairies cried to me:

"What do you seek here? We are green, poor child, we wear the colors of hope."

Then I returned to the city; I lost myself in its obscure streets; I looked up at the lights in all its windows, all those mysterious family nests; I watched the passing carriages; I saw man jostling against man. Oh! what solitude! How sad the smoke on those roofs! What sorrow in those tortuous streets where all are hur-

rying hither and thither, working and sweating, where thousands of strangers rub against your elbows; a cloaca where there is only society of bodies, while souls are solitary and alone, where all who hold out a hand to you are prostitutes! "Become corrupt, corrupt, and you will cease to suffer!" This has been the cry of all cities to man; it is written with charcoal on city walls, on its streets with mud, on its faces with extravasated blood.

And at times, when seated in the corner of some salon I watched the women as they danced, some rosy, some blue, and others white, their arms bare and hair clustered gracefully about their shapely heads, looking like cherubim drunk with light, floating in their spheres of harmony and beauty, I would think: "Ah, what a garden, what flowers to gather, to breathe! Ah! Marguerites, Marguerites! What will your last petal say to him who plucks it? A little, a little, but not all. That is the moral of the world, that is the end of your smiles. It is over this terrible abyss that you are walking in your flower-strewn gauze; it is on this hideous truth you run like gazelles on the tips of your little toes!"

"But why take things so seriously?" said Desgenais. "That is something that is never seen. You complain because bottles become empty? There are many casks in the vaults,

and many vaults in the hills. Make me a good fish-hook gilded with sweet words, with a drop of honey for bait, and quick! catch for me in the stream of oblivion a pretty consoler, as fresh and slippery as an eel; you will still have the hook when the fish shall have glided from your hands. Youth must pass away, and if I were you I would carry off the queen of Portugal rather than study anatomy."

Such was the advice of Desgenais. I made my way home with swollen heart, my face concealed under my cloak. I kneeled at the side of my bed and my poor heart dissolved in tears. What vows! what prayers! Galileo struck the earth, crying: "Nevertheless it moves!" Thus I struck my heart.

CHAPTER IX

Suddenly, in the midst of greatest despair youth and chance led me to commit an act that decided my fate.

I had written my mistress saying that I never wished to see her again; I kept my word, but I passed the nights under her window, seated on a bench before her door. I could see the lights in her room, I could hear the sound of her piano, at times I saw something that looked like a shadow through the partially drawn curtains.

One night, as I was seated on the bench, plunged in frightful melancholy, I saw a belated workman staggering along the street. He muttered a few words in a dazed manner and then began to sing. He was so much under the influence of liquor that he walked at times on one side of the gutter and then on the other. Finally he fell on a bench facing another house opposite me. There he lay still, supported on his elbows, and slept profoundly.

The street was deserted, a dry wind swept the dust here and there; the moon shone through a rift in the clouds and lighted the spot where the man slept. So I found myself *tête-à-tête* with this man who, not suspecting my presence, was sleeping on that stone bench as peacefully as though in his own bed.

He served to divert my grief; I arose to leave him in full possession, then returned and resumed my seat. I could not leave that door at which I would not have knocked for an empire. Finally, after walking up and down for a few times I stopped before the sleeper.

"What sleep!" I said. "Surely this man does not dream. His clothes are in tatters, his cheeks are wrinkled, his hands hardened with toil; he is some unfortunate who does not have bread every day. A thousand gnawing cares, a thousand mortal sorrows await his return to consciousness; nevertheless, this evening he had

a piece of money in his pocket, he entered a tavern where he purchased oblivion; he has earned enough in a week to enjoy a night of slumber and he has perhaps purchased it at the expense of his children's supper. Now his mistress can betray him, his friend can glide like a thief into his hut; I could shake him by the shoulder and tell him that he is being murdered, that his house is on fire; he would turn over and continue to sleep.

"And I, I do not sleep," I continued pacing up and down the street, "I do not sleep, I who have enough in my pocket at this moment to purchase sleep for a year; I am so proud and so foolish that I dare not enter a tavern, and I do not understand that if all unfortunates enter there, it is in order that they may come out happy. Oh! God! the juice of a grape crushed under the foot suffices to dissipate the deepest sorrow and to break all the invisible threads that the fates weave about our pathway. We weep like women, we suffer like martyrs; in our despair it seems that the world is crumbling under our feet and we sit down in our tears as did Adam at Eden's gate. And in order to cure our wound we have but to make a movement of the hand and moisten our throats. How pitiable our grief since it can be thus assuaged. We are surprised that Providence does not send angels to grant our prayers; it need not take the trouble,

for it has seen our woes, it knows our desires, our pride and bitterness, the ocean of evil that surrounds us, and is content to hang a small black fruit along our paths. Since that man sleeps so soundly on his bench why do not I sleep on mine? My rival is doubtless passing the night with my mistress; he will leave her at daybreak; she will accompany him to the door and they will see me asleep on my bench. Their kisses will not awaken me, and they will shake me by the shoulder; I will turn over on the other side and sleep on."

Thus, inspired by a fierce joy, I set out in quest of a tavern. As it was past midnight some were closed; that put me in a fury. "What!" I cried, "even that consolation is refused me!" I ran hither and thither knocking at the doors of taverns crying: "Wine! Wine!"

At last I found one open; I called for a bottle and without caring whether it was good or bad I gulped it down; a second followed and then a third. I dosed myself as with medicine, and I forced the wine down as though it had been prescribed by a physician to save my life.

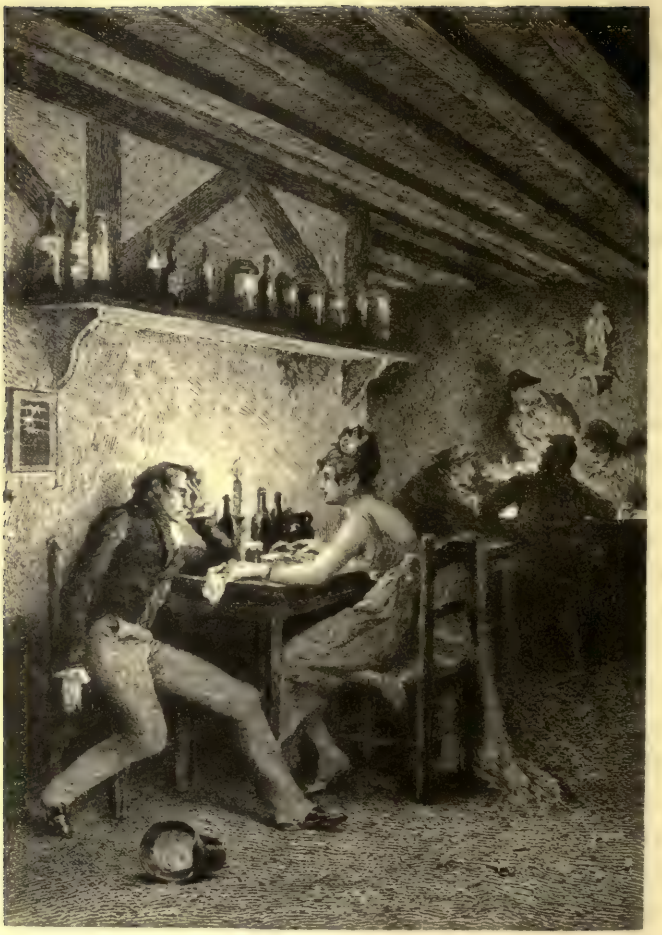
The heavy fumes of the liquor, which was doubtless adulterated, mounted to my head. As I had gulped it down at a breath, drunkenness seized me promptly; I felt that I was becoming muddled, then I experienced a lucid moment,

then confusion followed. Then consciousness left me, I leaned my elbows on the table and said adieu to myself.

But I had a confused idea that I was not alone in the tavern. At the other end of the room stood a hideous group with haggard faces and harsh voices. Their dress indicated that they belonged to the poorer class but were not *bourgeois;* in short they belonged to that ambiguous class, the vilest of all, which has neither fortune nor occupation, which never works except at some criminal plot, which is neither poor nor rich and combines the vices of one class with the misery of the other.

They were disputing over a dirty pack of cards; among them I saw a girl who appeared to be very young and very pretty, decently clad, and resembling her companions in no way, except in the harshness of her voice, which was rough and broken as though it had performed the office of public crier. She looked at me closely as though astonished to see me in such a place, for I was elegantly attired. Little by little she approached my table, and seeing that all the bottles were empty, smiled. I saw that she had fine teeth of brilliant whiteness; I took her hand and begged her to be seated; she consented with good grace and asked what we should have for supper.

I looked at her without saying a word, while



Drawing her handkerchief, she dried my tears

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my eyes began to fill with tears; she observed my emotion and inquired the cause. I could not reply. She understood that I had some secret sorrow and forebore any attempt to learn the cause; drawing her handkerchief she dried my tears from time to time as we dined.

There was something about that girl that was at once repulsive and sweet, a singular impudence mingled with pity, that I could not understand. If she had taken my hand in the street she would have inspired a feeling of horror in me, but it seemed so strange that a creature I had never seen should come to me, and without a word, proceed to order supper and dry my tears with her handkerchief that I was rendered speechless, revolted and yet charmed. What I had done had been done so quickly that I seemed to have obeyed some impulse of despair. Perhaps I was a fool or the victim of some supernal caprice.

"Who are you?" I suddenly cried out; "what do you want of me? How do you know who I am? Who told you to dry my tears? Is this your vocation and do you think I desire you? I would not touch you with the tip of my finger. What are you doing here? Reply at once. Is it money you want? What price do you put on your pity?"

I arose and tried to go out, but my feet refused to support me. At the same time my eyes

failed me, a mortal weakness took possession of me and I fell over a chair.

"You are not well," she said, taking me by the arm, "you have drunk, like the child that you are, without knowing what you were doing. Sit down in this chair and wait until a cab passes. You will tell me where you live and I will order the driver to take you home to your mother, since," she added, "you really find me ugly."

As she spoke I raised my eyes. Perhaps my drunkenness deceived me, or perhaps I had not seen her face clearly before, but suddenly I detected in that unfortunate a fatal resemblance to my mistress. I shuddered at the sight. There is a certain shudder that affects the hair; some say it is death passing over the head, but it was not death that passed over mine.

It was the malady of the age, or rather that girl was it herself; and it was she who, with her pale, half-mocking features, came and seated herself before me near the door of the tavern.

CHAPTER X

THE instant I noticed her resemblance to my mistress a frightful idea occurred to me; it took irresistible possession of my muddled mind and I put it into execution at once.

I took that girl home with me, I arranged my room just as I was accustomed to do when my mistress was with me. I was dominated by a certain recollection of past joys.

Having arranged my room to my satisfaction I gave myself up to the intoxication of despair. I probed my heart to the bottom in order to sound its depths. A Tyrolean song that my mistress used to sing began to run through my head:

Altra volta gieri biele,
Blanch 'e rossa com' un flore;
Ma ora nô. Non son piu biele,
Consumatis dal' amore.*

I listened to the echo of that song as it reverberated through my heart. I said: "Behold the happiness of man; behold my little Paradise; behold my queen Mab, a girl from the streets. My mistress is no better. Behold what is found at the bottom of the glass when the nectar of the gods has been drained; behold the corpse of love."

The unfortunate creature heard me singing and began to sing herself. I turned pale; for that harsh and rasping voice, coming from the lips of one who resembled my mistress, seemed to be a symbol of my experience. It sounded like a gurgle in the throat of debauchery. It

* Once I was beautiful, white and rosy as a flower; but now I am not. I am no longer beautiful, consumed by the fire of love.

seemed to me that my mistress, having been unfaithful, must have such a voice. I was reminded of Faust who, dancing at Brocken with a young sorceress, saw a red mouse come from her throat.

"Stop!" I cried. I arose and approached her.

Let me ask you, O, you men of the time, who are bent upon pleasure, who attend the balls and the opera and who upon retiring this night will seek slumber with the aid of some threadbare blasphemy of old Voltaire, some sensible badinage of Paul Louis Courier, some essay on economics, you who dally with the cold substance of that monstrous water-lily that Reason has planted in the hearts of our cities; I beg of you, if by some chance this obscure book falls into your hands, do not smile with noble disdain, do not shrug your shoulders; do not be too sure that I complain of an imaginary evil; do not be too sure that human reason is the most beautiful of faculties, that there is nothing real here below but quotations on the Bourse, gambling in the salon, wine on the table, a healthy body, indifference toward others, and the orgies which come with the night.

For some day, across your stagnant life, a gust of wind will blow. Those beautiful trees that you water with the stream of oblivion, Providence will destroy; you will be reduced to despair, messieurs the impassive, there will be tears in your eyes. I will not say that your mis-

tresses will deceive you; that would not grieve you so much as the loss of your horse; but I do tell you that you will lose on the Bourse; your moneyed tranquillity, your golden happiness are in the care of a banker who may fail; in short I tell you, all frozen as you are, you are capable of loving something; some fiber of your being will be torn and you will give vent to a cry that will resemble a moan of pain. Some day, wandering about the muddy streets, when daily material joys shall have failed, you will find yourself seated disconsolately on a deserted bench at midnight.

O! men of marble, sublime egoists, inimitable reasoners who have never given way to despair or made a mistake in arithmetic, if this ever happens to you, at the hour of your ruin you will remember Abelard when he lost Heloise. For he loved her more than you love your horses, your money or your mistresses; for he lost in losing her more than your prince Satan would lose in falling again from the battlements of Heaven; for he loved her with a certain love of which the gazettes do not speak, the shadow of which your wives and your daughters do not perceive in our theaters and in our books; for he passed half of his life kissing her white forehead, teaching her to sing the psalms of David and the canticles of Saul; for he did not love her on earth alone; and God consoled him.

Believe me, when in your distress you think of Abelard you will not look with the same eye upon the sweet blasphemy of Voltaire and the badinage of Courier; you will feel that the human reason can cure illusions but not sorrows; that God has use for Reason but He has not made her the sister of Charity. You will find that when the heart of man said: "I believe in nothing, for I see nothing," it did not speak the last word on the subject. You will look about you for something like hope, you will shake the doors of churches to see if they still swing, but you will find them walled up; you will think of becoming Trappists, and destiny will mock at you and for reply give you a bottle of wine and a courtesan.

And if you drink the wine, if you take the courtesan, you will have learned how such things come about.

PART II

CHAPTER I

AWAKENING the next morning I experienced a feeling of such deep disgust with myself, I felt so degraded in my own eyes that a horrible temptation assailed me. I leaped from bed and ordered the creature to leave my room as quickly as possible. Then I sat down and looked gloomily about the room, my eyes resting mechanically on a brace of pistols that decorated the walls.

When the suffering mind advances its hands, so to speak, toward annihilation, when our soul forms a violent resolution, there seems to be an independent physical horror in the act of touching the cold steel of some deadly weapon; the fingers stiffen in anguish, the arm grows cold and hard. Nature recoils as the condemned walks to death. I can not express what I experienced while waiting for that girl to go, unless it was as though my pistol had said to me: " Think what you are about to do."

Since then I have often wondered what would have happened to me if the girl had departed immediately. Doubtless the first flush of shame

would have subsided; sadness is not despair, and God has joined them in order that one should not leave us alone with the other. Once relieved of the presence of that woman, my heart would have become calm. There would remain only repentance, for the angel of pardon has forbidden man to kill. But I was doubtless cured for life; debauchery was once for all driven from my door and I would never again know the feeling of disgust with which its first visit had inspired me.

But it happened otherwise. The struggle which was going on within, the poignant reflections which overwhelmed me, the disgust, the fear, the wrath, even (for I experienced all these emotions at the same time), all these fatal powers nailed me to my chair, and, while I was thus a prey to the most dangerous delirium, the creature, standing before my mirror, thought of nothing but how best to arrange her dress and fix her hair, smiling the while. This lasted more than a quarter of an hour, during which I had almost forgotten her. Finally, some slight noise attracted my attention to her, and turning about with impatience I ordered her to leave the room in such a tone that she at once opened the door and threw me a kiss before going out.

At the same moment some one rang the bell of the outer door. I arose hastily and had only time to open the closet door and motion the crea-

ture into it when Desgenais entered the room with two friends.

The great currents that are found in the middle of the ocean resemble certain events in life. Fatality, Chance, Providence, what matters the name? Those who quarrel over the word, admit the fact. Such are not those who, speaking of Napoleon or Cæsar, say: " He was a man of Providence." They apparently believe that heroes merit the attention which Heaven shows them and that the color of purple attracts gods as well as bulls.

What decides the course of these little events, what objects and circumstances, in appearance the least important, lead to changes in fortune, there is not, to my mind, a deeper abyss for the thought. There is something in our ordinary actions that resembles the little blunted arrows we shoot at targets; little by little we make of our successive results an abstract and regular entity that we call our prudence or our will. Then a gust of wind passes, and behold the smallest of these arrows, the very lightest and most futile, is carried beyond our vision, beyond the horizon, to the dwelling-place of God himself.

What a strange feeling of unrest seizes us then! What becomes of those fantoms of tranquil pride, the will and prudence? Force itself, that mistress of the world, that sword of

man in the combat of life, in vain do we brandish it over our heads in wrath, in vain do we seek to ward off with it a blow which threatens us; an invisible power turns aside the point, and all the impetus of our effort, deflected into space, serves only to precipitate our fall.

Thus at the moment I was hoping to cleanse myself from the sin I had committed, perhaps to inflict the penalty, at the very instant when a great horror had taken possession of me, I learned that I had to sustain a dangerous intervention.

Desgenais was in good humor; stretching out on my sofa he began to chaff me about the appearance of my face which looked, he said, as though I had not slept well. As I was little disposed to indulge in pleasantry I begged him to spare me.

He appeared to pay no attention to me, but warned by my tone he soon broached the subject that had brought him to me. He informed me that my mistress had not only two lovers at a time, but three, that is to say she had treated my rival as badly as she had treated me; the poor boy having discovered her inconstancy made a great ado and all Paris knew it. At first I did not catch the meaning of Desgenais' words as I was not listening attentively; but when he had repeated his story three times in detail I was so stupefied that I could not reply.

My first impulse was to laugh, for I saw that I had loved the most unworthy of women; but it was no less true that I loved her still. "Is it possible?" was all I could say.

Desgenais' friends confirmed all he had said. My mistress had been surprised in her own house between two lovers, and a scene that all Paris knew by heart ensued. She was disgraced, obliged to leave Paris or remain exposed to the most bitter taunts.

It was easy for me to see that in all the ridicule expended on the subject of this woman, on my unreasonable passion for her, was premeditated. To say that she deserved severest censure, that she had perhaps committed worse sins than those with which she was charged, that was to make me feel that I had been merely one of her dupes.

All that did not please me; but Desgenais had undertaken the task of curing me of my love and was prepared to treat my disease heroically. A long friendship founded on mutual services gave him rights, and as his motive appeared praiseworthy I allowed him to have his way.

Not only did he not spare me, but when he saw my trouble and my shame increase, he pressed me the harder. My impatience was so obvious that he could not continue, so he stopped and remained silent, a course that irritated me still more.

In my turn I began to ask questions; I paced to and fro in my room. Although the recital of that story was insupportable, I wanted to hear it again. I tried to assume a smiling face and tranquil air, but in vain. Desgenais suddenly became silent after having shown himself to be a most virulent gossip. While I was pacing up and down my room he looked at me calmly as though I was a caged fox.

I can not express my feeling. A woman who had so long been the idol of my heart and who, since I had lost her, had caused me such deep affliction, the only one I had ever loved, she for whom I would weep till death, become suddenly a shameless wretch, the subject of coarse jests, of universal censure and scandal! It seemed to me that I felt on my shoulder the impression of a heated iron and that I was marked with a burning stigma.

The more I reflected, the more the darkness thickened about me. From time to time I turned my head and saw a cold smile or a curious glance. Desgenais did not leave me, he knew very well what he was doing, he knew that I might go to any length in my present desperate condition.

When he found that he had brought me to the desired point he did not hesitate to deal the finishing stroke.

"Does that story displease you?" he asked.

"The best is yet to come. My dear Octave, the scene I have described took place on a certain night when the moon was shining brightly; while the two lovers were quarreling over their fair one and talking of cutting her throat as she sat before the fire, down in the street a certain shadow was seen to pass up and down before the house, a shadow that resembled you so closely that it was decided that it must be you."

"Who says that," I asked, "who has seen me in the street?"

"Your mistress herself; she has told every one about it who cared to listen, just as cheerfully as we tell you her story. She claims that you love her still, that you keep guard at her door, in short—everything you can think of; but you should know that she talks about you publicly."

I have never been able to lie, for whenever I have tried to disguise the truth my face betrayed me. *Amour propre,* the shame of confessing my weakness before witnesses induced me, however, to make the effort. "It is very true that I was in the street," I thought, "but if I had known that my mistress was as bad as she was, I would not have been there."

Finally I persuaded myself that I had not been seen distinctly; I attempted to deny it. A deep blush suffused my face and I felt the futility of my feint. Desgenais smiled.

"Take care," said he, "take care, do not go too far."

"But," I protested, "how did I know it, how could I know——"

Desgenais compressed his lips as though to say:

"You knew enough."

I stopped short, mumbling the remnant of my sentence. My blood became so hot that I could not continue.

"I, in the street bathed in tears, in despair; and during that time that encounter within! What! that very night! Mocked by her! Surely Desgenais you are dreaming. Is it true? Can it be possible? What do you know about it?"

Thus talking at random, I lost my head, and an irresistible feeling of wrath began to rise within me. Finally I sat down exhausted.

"My friend," said Desgenais, "do not take the thing so seriously. The solitary life you have been leading for the last two months has made you ill, I see you have need of distraction. Come to supper with me this evening, and to-morrow morning we will go to the country."

The tone in which he said this hurt me more than anything else; in vain I tried to control myself. "Yes," I thought, "deceived by that woman, poisoned by horrible suggestions, having no refuge either in work or in fatigue, having for my only safeguard against despair and

ruin, a sacred but frightful grief. O God! it is that grief, that sacred relic of my sorrow that has just crumbled in my hands! It is no longer my love, it is my despair that is insulted. Mockery! She mocks at me as I weep!" That appeared incredible to me. All the memories of the past clustered about my heart when I thought of it. I seemed to see, one after the other, the specters of our nights of love; they hung over a bottomless eternal abyss, black as chaos, and from the bottom of that abyss there burst forth a shriek of laughter, sweet but mocking, that said: "Behold your reward!"

If I had been told that the world mocked at me I would have replied: "So much the worse for it," and I would not be angry; but at the same time I was told that my mistress was a shameless wretch. Thus, on one side, the ridicule was public, vouched for, stated by two witnesses who, before telling what they knew, must have felt that the world was against me; and, on the other hand, what reply could I make? How could I escape? What could I do when the center of my life, my heart itself, was ruined, killed, annihilated. What could I say when that woman for whom I had braved all, ridicule as well as blame, for whom I had borne a mountain of misery, when that woman whom I loved and who loved another, of whom I demanded no love, of whom I desired nothing but

permission to weep at her door, no favor but that of vowing my youth to her memory and writing her name, her name alone, on the tomb of my hopes! Ah! when I thought of it, I felt the hand of death heavy upon me; that woman mocked me, it was she who first pointed her finger at me, singling me out to the idle crowd which surrounded her; it was she, it was those lips so many times pressed to mine, it was that body, that soul of my life, my flesh and my blood, it was from that source the injury came; yes, the last of all, the most cowardly and the most bitter, the pitiless laugh that spits in the face of grief.

The more I thought of it the more enraged I became. Did I say enraged? I do not know what passion controlled me. What I do know is that an inordinate desire for vengeance took possession of me. How could I revenge myself on a woman? I would have paid any price for a weapon that could be used against her. But I had none, not even the one she had employed; I could not pay her in her own coin.

Suddenly I noticed a shadow moving behind the curtain before the closet. I had forgotten her.

"Listen to me!" I cried, rising. "I have loved, I have loved like a fool. I deserve all the ridicule you have subjected me to. But, by Heaven! I will show you something that will

prove to you that I am not such a fool as you think."

With these words I pulled aside the curtain and exposed the interior of the closet. The girl was trying to conceal herself in a corner.

"Go in, if you choose," I said to Desgenais; "you who call me a fool for loving a woman, see how your teaching has affected me. Do you think I passed last night under the windows of—? But that is not all," I added, "that is not all I have to say. You give a supper to-night, and to-morrow go to the country; I am with you, and shall not leave you from now on. We shall not separate, but pass the entire day together. Are you with me? Agreed! I have tried to make of my heart the mausoleum of my love, but I will bury my love in another tomb."

With these words I sat down, marveling how indignation can solace grief and restore happiness. Whoever is astonished to learn that from that day I completely changed my course of life does not know the heart of man, and he does not understand that a young man of twenty may hesitate before taking a step, but does not retreat when he has once taken it.

CHAPTER II

THE apprenticeship to debauchery resembles vertigo, for one feels at first a sort of terror mingled with sensuous delight as though peering down from some dizzy height. While shameful secret dissipation ruins the noblest of men, in frank and open irregularities there is some palliation even for the most depraved. He who goes at nightfall, muffled in his cloak, to sully his life incognito, and to clandestinely shake off the hypocrisy of the day, resembles an Italian who strikes his enemy from behind, not daring to provoke him to open quarrel. There are assassinations in the dark corners of the city under shelter of the night. He who goes his way without concealment says: "Every one does it and conceals it; I do it and do not conceal it." Thus speaks pride, and once that cuirass has been buckled on, it glitters with the refulgent light of day.

It is said that Damocles saw a sword suspended over his head. Thus libertines seem to have something over their heads which says: "Go on, but I hold the thread." Those masked carriages that are seen during carnival are the faithful images of their life. A dilapidated open wagon, flaming torches lighting up painted faces; such laugh and sing. Among them you

see what appears to be women; they are in fact the remains of women, with human semblance. They are caressed and insulted; no one knows who they are or what their names. All that floats and staggers under the flaming torch in an intoxication that thinks of nothing, and over which, it is said, a god watches.

But if the first impression is astonishment, the second is horror, and the third pity. There is displayed there so much force, or rather such an abuse of force, that it often happens that the noblest characters and the strongest constitutions are ruined. It appears hardy and dangerous to these; they would make prodigies of themselves; they bind themselves to debauchery as did Mazeppa to his horse; they gallop, they make Centaurs of themselves, and they see neither the bloody trail that the shreds of their flesh leave, nor the eyes of the wolves that gleam in hungry pursuit, nor the desert, nor the vultures.

Launched into that life by the circumstances that I have recounted, I must now describe what I saw there.

The first time I had a close view of one of those famous gatherings called theatrical masked balls I heard the debauchery of the Regency spoken of, and the time when a queen of France was disguised as a flower merchant. I found there flower merchants disguised as camp-fol-

lowers. I expected to find libertinism there, but in fact I found none at all. It is only the scum of libertinism, some blows and drunken women lying in deathlike stupor on broken bottles.

The first time I saw debauchery at table I heard of the suppers of Heliogabalus and of the philosophy of Greece which made the pleasure of the senses a kind of religion of nature. I expected to find oblivion or something like joy; I found there the worst thing in the world, ennui trying to live, and an Englishman who said: "I do this or that, therefore I amuse myself. I have spent so many pieces of gold, therefore I experience so much pleasure." And they wear out their life on that grindstone.

The first time I saw courtesans I heard of Aspasia who sat on the knees of Alcibiades while discussing philosophy with Socrates. I expected to find something bold and insolent, but gay, free, and vivacious, something of the sparkle of champagne; I found a yawning mouth, a fixed eye and hooked hands.

The first time I saw titled courtesans I read Boccaccio and Andallo; tasting of everything, I read Shakespeare. I had dreamed of those beautiful triflers; of those cherubim of hell. A thousand times I had drawn those heads so poetically foolish, so enterprising in audacity, heads of harebrained mistresses who spoil a ro-

mance with a glance and who walk through life by waves and by shocks like the undulating sirens; I thought of the fairies of the modern tales who are always drunk with love if not with wine. I found, instead, writers of letters, arrangers of precise hours who practise lying as an art and cloak their baseness under hypocrisy, whose only thought is to give themselves and forget.

The first time I looked on the gaming table I heard of floods of gold, of fortunes made in the quarter of an hour, and of a lord of the court of Henry IV who won on one card a hundred thousand *louis.* I found a narrow room where workmen who had but one shirt, rented a suit for the evening for twenty *sous,* police stationed at the door and starving wretches staking a crust of bread against a pistol-shot.

The first time I saw an assembly, public or other, open to one of those thirty thousand women who are permitted to sell themselves in Paris, I heard of the saturnalia of all times, of every imaginable orgy, from Babylon to Rome, from the temple of Priapus to the *Parc-aux-Cerfs,* and I have always seen written on the sill of that door the word, " Pleasure." I found nothing suggestive of pleasure but in its place the word, " Prostitution;" and it has always appeared ineffaceable, not graven in that metal that takes the sun's light, but in the palest of all,

that of the cold light whose colors seem tinted by the somber hues of night, silver.

The first time I saw the people—it was a frightful morning of Ash Wednesday, near Courtille. A cold fine rain had been falling since the evening before; the streets were covered with pools of water. Masked carriages filed hither and thither, crowding between hedges of hideous men and women standing on the sidewalks. That sinister wall of spectators had tiger eyes, red with wine, gleaming with hatred. The carriage wheels splashed mud over this wall, but it did not move. I was standing on the front seat of an open carriage; from time to time a man in rags would step out from the wall, hurl a torrent of abuse at us, then cover us with a cloud of flour. Mud would soon follow; yet we kept on our way toward the Isle of Love and the pretty wood of Romainville consecrated by so many sweet kisses. One of my friends fell from his seat into the mud, narrowly escaping death on the paving. The people threw themselves on him to overpower him and we were obliged to hasten to his assistance. One of the trumpeters who preceded us on horseback was struck on the shoulder by a paving stone; the flour had given out. I had never heard of anything like that.

I began to understand the time and comprehend the spirit of the age.

CHAPTER III

DESGENAIS had planned a reunion of young people at his country house. The best wines, a splendid table, gaming, dancing, hunting, nothing was lacking. Desgenais was rich and generous. He combined antique hospitality with modern custom. Moreover one could always find in his house the best books; his conversation was that of a man of learning and culture. He was a problem.

I took with me a taciturn humor that nothing could overcome; he respected it scrupulously. I did not reply to his questions and he dropped the subject; he was satisfied that I had forgotten my mistress. Nevertheless, I went to the chase and appeared at the table and was as convivial as the best; he asked no more.

One of the most unfortunate proclivities of inexperienced youth is to judge of the world from first impressions; but it must be confessed that there is a race of men who are very unfortunate; it is that race which says to youth: "You are right in believing in evil, and we know what it is." I have heard, for example, a curious thing spoken of, a medium between good and evil, a certain arrangement between heartless women and men worthy of them; they call love the passing sentiment. They speak of it as of an engine

constructed by a wagon builder or a building contractor. They said to me: "This and that are agreed upon, such and such phrases are spoken and certain others are repeated in reply; letters are written in a prescribed manner, the knees adjusted in a certain attitude." All that was regulated as a parade; these fine fellows had gray hair.

That made me laugh. Unfortunately for me I can not tell a woman whom I despise that I love her, even when I know that it is only a convention and that she will not be deceived by it. I have never bent my knee to the ground when my heart did not go with it. So that class of women known as easy is unknown to me, or if I allow myself to be taken with them, it is without knowing it, and through simplicity.

I can understand that one's soul can be put aside but not that it should be handled. That there is some pride in this, I confess, but I do not intend either to boast or to lower myself. Above all things I hate those women who laugh at love and I permit them to reciprocate the sentiment; there will never be any dispute between us.

Such women are beneath the courtesans, for courtesans may lie as well as they; but courtesans are capable of love and those women are not. I remember a woman who loved me and who said to a man many times richer than I with whom

she was living: " I am weary of you, I am going to my lover." That woman is worth more than many others who are not despised by society.

I passed the entire season with Desgenais, and learned that my mistress had left France; that news left in my heart a feeling of languor which I could not overcome.

At the sight of that world which surrounded me, so new to me, I experienced at first a kind of bizarre curiosity, at once sad and profound, that caused me to look at things as does a restless horse. An incident occurred which made a deep impression on me.

Desgenais had with him a very beautiful mistress who loved him much. One evening as I was walking with him I told him that I considered her such as she was, that is to say, admirable, as much on account of her attachment for him as because of her beauty. In short, I praised her highly and with warmth, giving him to understand that he ought to be happy.

He made no reply. It was his manner, for he was the driest of men. That night when all had retired and I had been in bed some fifteen minutes I heard a knock at my door. I supposed it was some one of my friends who could not sleep and invited him to enter.

There appeared before my astonished eyes a woman, very pale, carrying a bouquet in her hands to which was attached a piece of paper

bearing these words: "To Octave, from his friend Desgenais."

I had no sooner read these words when a flash of light came to me. I understood the meaning of this action of Desgenais in making me this Turk's gift. It was intended for a lesson in love. That woman loved him, I had praised her and he wished to tell me that I ought not to love her, whether I refused her or accepted her.

That made me think. The poor woman was weeping and did not dare dry her tears for fear I would see them. What threat had he used to make her come? I did not know. I said to her:

"You may return and fear nothing."

She replied that if she should return Desgenais would send her back to Paris.

"Yes," I replied, "you are beautiful and I am susceptible to temptation; but you weep, and your tears not being shed for me, I care nothing for the rest. Go, therefore, and I will see to it that you are not sent back to Paris."

One of my peculiarities is that meditation, which with the great number is a firm and constant quality of the mind, is in my case an instinct independent of the will and it seizes me like an access of passion. It comes to me at intervals in its own good time, in spite of me and in almost any place. But when it comes I can do nothing against it. It takes me whither it pleases by whatever route seems good to it.

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When the woman had left, I sat up.

" My friend," I said to myself, " behold what has been sent you. If Desgenais had not seen fit to send you his mistress he would not have been mistaken, perhaps, in supposing that you might fall in love with her.

" Have you well considered it? A sublime and divine mystery is accomplished. Such a being costs nature the most vigilant maternal care; yet man who would cure you, can think of nothing better than to offer you lips which belong to him in order to teach you how to cease to love.

" How was it accomplished? Others than you have doubtless admired her, but they ran no risk. She might employ all the seduction she pleased; you alone were in danger.

" It must be that Desgenais has a heart, since he lives. In what respect does he differ from you? He is a man who believes in nothing, fears nothing, who knows no care or ennui, perhaps, and yet it is clear that a scratch on the finger would fill him with terror, for if his body abandons him, what becomes of him? He lives only in the body. What sort of creature is that who treats his soul as the flagellants treat their bodies? Can one live without a head?

" Think of it. Here is a man who possesses the most beautiful woman in the world; he is young and ardent; he finds her beautiful and tells her so; she replies that she loves him. Some

one touches him on the shoulder and says to him: 'She is unfaithful.' Nothing more, he is sure of himself. If some one had said: 'She is a poisoner,' he would, perhaps, have continued to love her, he would not have given her a kiss less; but she is unfaithful and it is no more a question of love with him than of the star of Saturn.

"What is there in that word? A word that is merited, positive, withering, it is agreed. But why? It is still but a word. Can you kill a body with a word?

"And if you love that body? Some one pours a glass of wine and says to you: 'Do not love that, for you can get four for six francs.' And if you become intoxicated?

"But that Desgenais loves his mistress, since he keeps her; he must, therefore, have a peculiar fashion of loving? No, he has not; his fashion of loving is not love, and he cares no more for the woman who merits affection than for her who is unworthy. He loves no one, simply and truly.

"What has led him to that? Was he born thus? To love is as natural as to eat and to drink. He is not a man. Is he a dwarf or a giant? What! always that impassive body? Upon what does he feed, what brew does he drink? Behold him at thirty as old as the senile Mithridates; the poisons of vipers are his familiar friends.

"There is the great secret, my child, the key

to which you must seize. By whatever process of reasoning debauchery may be defended, it will be proven that it is natural at a given day, hour or evening, but not to-morrow nor every day. There is not a people on earth which has not considered woman either the companion and consolation of man or the sacred instrument of life, and has not under these two forms honored her. And yet here is an armed warrior who leaps into the abyss that God has dug with his own hands between man and brute; as well might he deny the fact. What mute Titian is this who dares repress under the kisses of the body the love of the thought, and place on human lips the stigma of the brute, the seal of eternal silence?

"There is a word that should be studied. There breathes under the wind of those dismal forests that are called secrets of the body, one of those mysteries that the angels of destruction whisper in the ear of night as it descends upon the earth. That man is better or worse than God has made him. His bowels are like those of sterile women, where nature has not completed her work, or there is distilled in the shadow some venomous poison.

"Ah! yes, neither occupation nor study have been able to cure you, my friend. To forget and to learn, that is your device. You finger the leaves of dead books; you are too young for ruins. Look about you, the pale herd of men surrounds

you. The eyes of the sphinx glitter in the midst of divine hieroglyphics; decipher the book of life! Courage, scholar, launch out on the Styx, the invulnerable flood, and let the waves of sorrow waft you to death or to God."

CHAPTER IV

"ALL there was of good in that, supposing there was some good in it, was that false pleasures were the seeds of sorrow and of bitterness which fatigued me to the point of exhaustion." Such are the simple words spoken with reference to his youth by that man who was the most a man of any who have lived, Saint Augustine. Of those who have done as I, few would say those words, all have them in their hearts; I have found no others in mine.

Returning to Paris in the month of December I passed the winter attending pleasure parties, masquerades, suppers, rarely leaving Desgenais, who was delighted with me; I was not with him. The more I went about, the more unhappy I became. It seemed to me after a short enough time, that the world, which had at first appeared so strange, would tie me up, so to speak, at every step; where I had expected to see a specter, I discovered, upon closer inspection, a shadow.

Desgenais asked what was the matter with me.

"And you?" I asked. "What is the matter with you? You have lost some relative? Or do you suffer from some wound?"

At times he seemed to understand me and did not question me. We sat down before a table and drank until we lost our heads; in the middle of the night we took horses and rode ten or twelve leagues into the country; returning we went to the bath, then to table, then to gambling, then to bed; and when I reached mine, I fell on my knees and wept. That was my evening prayer.

Strange to say, I took pride in passing for what I was not, I boasted of being worse than I really was, and experienced a sort of melancholy pleasure in doing so. When I had actually done what I claimed, I felt nothing but ennui, but when I invented an account of some folly, some story of debauchery or recital of an orgy with which I had nothing to do, it seemed to me that my heart was better satisfied, although I know not why.

Whenever I joined a party of pleasure-seekers and we visited some spot made sacred by tender associations I became stupid, went off by myself, looked gloomily at the trees and bushes as though I would like to crush them under my feet. Upon my return I would remain silent for hours.

The baleful idea that truth is nudity beset me on every occasion.

"The world," I said to myself, "is accustomed to call his disguise virtue, his chaplet religion, his flowing mantle convenience. Honor and Morality are his chamber-maids; he drinks in his wine the tears of the poor in spirit who believe in him; while the sun is high in the heavens he walks about with downcast eye; he goes to church, to the ball, to the assembly, and when evening has come he removes his mantle and there appears a naked bacchante with hoofs of a goat."

But such thoughts aroused a feeling of horror, for I felt that if the body was under the clothing, the skeleton was under the body. "Is it possible that that is all?" I asked in spite of myself. Then I returned to the city, I saw a little girl take her mother's arm and I became like a child.

Although I had followed my friends into all manner of dissipation, I had no desire to resume my place in the world of society. The sight of women caused me intolerable pain; I could not touch a woman's hand without trembling. I had decided never to love again.

Nevertheless I returned from the ball one evening so sick at heart that I feared that it was love. I happened to have beside me at supper the most charming and the most distinguished woman whom it had ever been my good fortune to meet. When I closed my eyes to sleep I saw

her image before me. I thought I was lost, and I at once resolved that I would avoid meeting her again. A sort of fever seized me and I lay on my bed for fifteen days, repeating over and over the lightest words I had exchanged with her.

As there is no spot on earth where one is so well known by his neighbors as at Paris, it was not long before people of my acquaintance who had seen me with Desgenais began to accuse me of being a great libertine. In that I admired the discernment of the world: in proportion as I had passed for inexperienced and sensitive at the time of my rupture with my mistress, I was now considered insensible and hardened. Some one had just told me that it was clear I had never loved that woman, that I had doubtless merely played at love, thereby paying me a compliment which I really did not deserve; but the most of it was that I was so swollen with vanity that I was charmed with that view.

My desire was to pass for blasé, even while I was filled with desires and my exalted imagination was carrying me beyond all limits. I began to say that I could not make any headway with the women; my head was filled with chimeras which I preferred to realities. In short, my unique pleasure consisted in altering the nature of facts. If a thought were but extraordinary, if it shocked common sense, I became its ardent

champion at the risk of advocating the most dangerous sentiments.

My greatest fault was imitation of everything that struck me, not by its beauty but by its strangeness, and not wishing to confess myself an imitator I resorted to exaggeration in order to appear original. According to my idea nothing was good or even tolerable; nothing was worth the trouble of turning the head, and yet when I had become warmed up in a discussion it seemed as if there was no expression in the French language violent enough to sustain my cause; but my warmth would subside as soon as my opponents ranged themselves on my side.

It was a natural consequence of my conduct. Although disgusted with the life I was leading I was unwilling to change it:

> Simigliante a quella 'nferma
> Che non può trovar posa in su le piume,
> Ma con dar voltà suo dolore scherma.—DANTE.

Thus I tortured my mind to give it change and I fell into all these vagaries in order to get out of myself.

But while my vanity was thus occupied, my heart was suffering, so that there was always within me a man who laughed and a man who wept. It was a perpetual counter-stroke between my head and my heart. My own mock-

eries frequently caused me great pain and my deepest sorrows aroused a desire to burst into laughter.

One day a man boasted of being proof against superstitious fears, in fact, fear of every kind; his friends put a human skeleton in his bed and then concealed themselves in an adjoining room to wait for his return. They did not hear any noise, but in the morning they found him dressed and sitting on the bed playing with the bones; he had lost his reason.

There would be in me something that resembled that man but for the fact that my favorite bones were those of a well-beloved skeleton; they were the débris of my love, all that remained of the past.

But it must not be supposed that there were no good moments in all this disorder. Among Desgenais's companions were several young men of distinction, a number of artists. We sometimes passed together delightful evenings under pretext of being libertines. One of them was infatuated with a beautiful singer who charmed us with her fresh and melancholy voice. How many times we sat listening while supper was served and waiting! How many times, when the flagons had been emptied, one of us held a volume of Lamartine and read in a voice choked by emotion! Every other thought disappeared. The hours passed by unheeded. What strange

libertines we were! We did not speak a word and there were tears in our eyes.

Desgenais especially, habitually the coldest and driest of men, was inexplicable on such occasions; he delivered himself of such extraordinary sentiments that he might have been considered a poet in delirium. But after these effusions he would be seized with furious joy. He would break everything within reach when warmed by wine; the genius of destruction stalked forth armed to the teeth. I have seen him pick up a chair and hurl it through a closed window.

I could not help making a study of that singular man. He appeared to me the marked type of a class which ought to exist somewhere but which was unknown to me. One could never tell whether his outbursts were the despair of a man sick of life, or the whim of a spoiled child.

During the fête, in particular, he was in such a state of nervous excitation that he acted like a schoolboy. He persuaded me to go out on foot with him one day, muffled in grotesque costumes, with masks and instruments of music. We promenaded gravely all night, in the midst of a most frightful din of horrible sounds. We found a driver asleep on his box and unhitched his horses; then pretending we had just come from the ball, set up a great cry. The coachman started up, cracked his whip and his horses

started off on a trot, leaving him seated on the box. The same evening we passed through the *Champs Élysées;* Desgenais, seeing another carriage passing, stopped it after the manner of a highwayman; he intimidated the coachman by threats and forced him to climb down and lie flat on his stomach. He then opened the carriage door and found within a young man and lady motionless with fright. Whispering to me to imitate him, we began to enter one door and go out the other, so that in the obscurity the poor young people thought they saw a procession of bandits going through their carriage.

As I understand it, the men who say that the world gives experience ought to be astonished if they are believed. The world is merely a number of whirlpools, each one whirling independent of the others; they float about in groups like flocks of birds. There is no resemblance between the different quarters of the same city, and the denizen of the *Chausée d'Antin* has as much to learn at *Marais* as at Lisbon. It is true that these whirlpools are traversed, and have been since the beginning of the world, by seven personages who are always the same: the first is called hope; the second, conscience; the third, opinion; the fourth, desire; the fifth, sorrow; the sixth, pride; and the seventh, man.

We were, therefore, my companions and I, a flock of birds, and we remained together

until springtime, sometimes singing, sometimes flying.

"But," the reader objects, "where are the women in all this? I see nothing of debauchery here."

O! creatures who bear the name of women and who have passed like dreams through a life that was itself a dream, what shall I say of you? Where there is no shadow of hope can there be memory? Where shall I seek for memory's meed? What is there more dumb in human memory? What is there more completely forgotten than you?

If I must speak of women I will mention two; here is one of them:

I ask what would be expected of a poor sewing-girl, young and pretty, about eighteen, with a romantic affair on her hands that is purely a question of love; with little knowledge of life and no idea of morals; eternally sewing near a window before which processions were not allowed to pass, by order of the police, but near which a dozen women prowled who were licensed and recognized by these same police; what could you expect of her, when, after having tired her hands and eyes all day long on a dress or a hat, she leans out of that window as night falls? That dress she has sewed, that hat she has trimmed with her poor and honest hands in order to earn a supper for the household, she sees pass-

ing along the street on the head or on the body of a public woman. Thirty times a day a hired carriage stops before the door and there steps out a prostitute, numbered as is the hack in which she rides, who stands before a glass and primps, taking off and putting on the results of many days' work on the part of the poor girl who watches her. She sees that woman draw from her pocket six pieces of gold, she who has but one a week; she looks at her feet and her head, she examines her dress, and eyes her as she steps into her carriage; and then, what could you expect? When night has fallen, after a day when work has been scarce, when her mother is sick, she opens her door, stretches out her hand and stops a passer-by.

Such was the story of a girl I have known. She could play the piano, knew something of accounts, a little designing, even a little history and grammar, and thus a little of everything. How many times have I regarded with poignant compassion that sad sketch made by nature and mutilated by society! How many times have I followed in the darkness the pale and vacillating gleam of a spark flickering in abortive life! How many times have I tried to revive the fire that smoldered under those ashes! Alas! her long hair was the color of ashes and we called her Cendrillon.

I was not rich enough to help her; Desgenais,

at my request, interested himself in the poor creature; he made her learn over again all of which she had a slight knowledge. But she could make no appreciable progress. When her teacher left her she would fold her arms and for hours look silently across the public square. What days! What misery! One day I threatened that if she did not work she should have no money; she silently resumed her task and I learned that she stole out of the house a few minutes later. Where did she go? God knows. Before she left I asked her to embroider a purse for me. I still have that sad relic, it hangs in my room a monument of the ruin that is wrought here below.

But here is another case:

It was about ten in the evening when, after a riotous day, we repaired to Desgenais, who had left us some hours before to make his preparations. The orchestra was ready and the room filled when we arrived.

Most of the dancers were girls from the theaters. As soon as we entered I plunged into the giddy whirl of the waltz. That delightful exercise has always been dear to me; I know of nothing more beautiful, more worthy of a beautiful woman and a young man; all dances compared with the waltz are but insipid conventions or pretexts for insignificant converse. It is truly to possess a woman, in a certain sense, to hold her for a half hour in your arms, and to draw her on

in the dance, palpitating in spite of herself, in such a way that it can not be positively asserted whether she is being protected or seduced. Some deliver themselves up to the pleasure with such modest voluptuousness, with such sweet and pure abandon that one does not know whether he experiences desire or fear, and whether, if pressed to the heart they would faint or break in pieces like the rose. Germany, where that dance was invented, is surely the land of love.

I held in my arms a superb danseuse from an Italian theater who had come to Paris for the carnival; she wore the costume of a bacchante, with a dress of panther's skin. Never have I seen anything so languishing as that creature. She was tall and slender, and while dancing with extreme rapidity, had the appearance of allowing herself to be led; to see her one would think that she would tire her partner, but such was not the case, for she moved as though by enchantment.

On her bosom rested an enormous bouquet, the perfume of which intoxicated me. She yielded to my encircling arms as does the Indian liana, with a gentleness so sweet and so sympathetic that I seemed surrounded with a perfumed veil of silk. At each turn there could be heard a light tinkling from her metal girdle; she moved so gracefully that I thought I beheld a beautiful star, and her smile was that of a fairy about to

vanish from human sight. The tender and voluptuous music of the dance seemed to come from her lips, while her head, covered with a wilderness of black tresses, bent backward as though her neck was too slender to support its weight.

When the waltz was over I threw myself on a chair; my heart beat wildly. "O, Heaven!" I murmured, "how can it be possible! O, superb monster! O, beautiful reptile! How you writhe, how you coil in and out, sweet adder, with supple and spotted skin! Thy cousin the serpent has taught thee to coil about the tree of life, holding between thy lips the apple of temptation. O, Melusina! Melusina! The hearts of men are thine. You know it well, enchantress, with your soft languor that seems to suspect nothing! You know very well that you ruin, that you destroy, you know that he who touches you will suffer; you know that he dies who basks in your smile, who breathes the perfume of your flowers and comes under the magic influence of your charms; that is why you abandon yourself so freely, that is why your smile is so sweet, your flowers so fresh; that is why you so gently place your arms on our shoulders. O, Heaven! what is your will with us?"

Professor Hallé has said a terrible thing: "Woman is the nervous part of humanity, man the muscular." Humboldt himself, that serious thinker, has said that an invisible atmosphere sur-

rounds the human nerves. I do not quote the dreamers who watch the flight of Spallanzani's bat, and who think they have found a sixth sense in nature. Such as nature is, her mysteries are terrible enough, her powers mighty enough, that nature which creates us, mocks at us, and kills us, without deepening the shadows that surround us. But where is the man who has lived who will deny woman's power over us, if he has ever taken leave of a beautiful dancer with trembling hands. If he has ever felt that indefinable enervating magnetism which, in the midst of the dance, under the influence of the sound of music, and the warmth that makes all else seem cold, that comes from a young woman, that electrifies her and leaps from her to him as the perfume of aloes from the swinging censer? I was struck with stupor. I was familiar with a certain sensation similar to drunkenness, which characterizes love; I knew that it was the aureole which crowned the well-beloved. But that she should excite such heart-throbs, that she should evoke such fantoms with nothing but her beauty, her flowers, her motley costume, and a certain trick of turning she had learned from some merry-andrew; and that without a word, without a thought, without even appearing to know it! What was chaos if it required seven days to transform it?

It was not love, however, that I felt, and I

do not know how to describe it unless I call it thirst. For the first time I felt vibrating in my body a cord that was not attuned to my heart. The sight of that beautiful animal had aroused a responsive roar from another animal in my bowels. I felt sure I would never tell that woman that I loved her or that she pleased me or even that she was beautiful; there was nothing on my lips but a desire to kiss her, and say to her: "Make a girdle of those listless arms and lean that head on my breast; place that sweet smile on my lips." My body loved hers, I was under the influence of beauty as of wine.

Desgenais passed and asked what I was doing there.

"Who is that woman?" I asked.

"What woman? Of whom do you speak?"

I took his arm and led him into the hall. The Italian saw us coming and smiled. I stopped and stepped back.

"Ah!" said Desgenais, "you have danced with Marco?"

"Who is Marco?" I asked.

"Why, that idle creature who is laughing over there. Does she please you?"

"No," I replied, "I have waltzed with her and wanted to know her name; I have no further interest in her."

Shame led me to speak thus, but when Desgenais turned away I followed him.

"You are very prompt," he said, "Marco is no ordinary woman. She was almost the wife of M. de——, ambassador to Milan. One of his friends brought her here. Yet," he added, "you may rest assured I shall speak to her. We shall not allow you to die so long as there is any hope for you or any resource left untried. It is possible that she will remain to supper."

He left me, and I was alarmed to see him approach her. But they were soon lost in the crowd.

"Is it possible," I murmured, "have I come to this? O, heavens! is this what I am going to love? But after all," I thought, "my senses have spoken, but not my heart."

Thus I tried to calm myself. A few minutes later Desgenais tapped me on the shoulder.

"We shall go to supper at once," said he. "You will give your arm to Marco; she knows that she has pleased you and it is all arranged."

"Listen," I said; "I hardly know what I experienced. It seems to me I see limping Vulcan covering Venus with kisses while his beard smokes with the fumes of the forge. He fixes his affrighted eyes on the dazzling skin of his prey. His happiness in the possession of his prize causes him to laugh for joy, and at the same time shudder with happiness, and then he remembers his father, Jupiter, who is seated up on high among the gods."

Desgenais looked at me but made no reply; taking me by the arm he led me away.

"I am tired," he said, "and I am sad; this noise wearies me. Let us go to supper, that will refresh us."

The supper was splendid, but I could not touch it.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Marco.

But I sat like a statue, making no reply and looking at her from head to foot with amazement.

She began to laugh, and Desgenais, who could see us from his table, joined her. Before her was a large crystal glass, cut in the shape of a chalice, which reflected the glittering lights on its thousand sparkling facets, shining like the prism and revealing the seven colors of the rainbow. She listlessly extended her arm and filled it to the brim with Cyprian and a sweetened Oriental wine which I afterward found so bitter on the deserted Lido.

"Here," she said, presenting it to me, "*per voi, bambino mio.*"

"For you and for me," I said, presenting her my glass in turn.

She moistened her lips while I emptied my glass, unable to conceal the sadness she seemed to read in my eyes.

"Is it not good?" she asked.

"No," I replied.

"Perhaps your head aches?"

"No."

"Or you are tired?"

"No."

"Ah! then it is the ennui of love?"

With these words she became serious, for in spite of herself, in speaking of love, her Italian heart beat the faster.

A scene of folly ensued. Heads were becoming heated, cheeks were assuming that purple hue with which wine colors the face as though to prevent shame from appearing there; a confused murmur like to that of a rising sea could be heard all over the room, here and there eyes would become inflamed, then fixed and empty; I know not what wind stirred above this drunkenness. A woman rose, as in a tranquil sea the first wave that feels the tempest's breath, and rises to announce it; she makes a sign with her hand to command silence, empties her glass at a gulp, and with the same movement undoes her hair, which falls in shining tresses over her shoulders; she opens her mouth as though to start a drinking song; her eyes were half closed. She breathed with an effort; twice a harsh sound came from her throat; a mortal pallor overspread her features and she dropped into her chair.

Then came an uproar which lasted an hour. It was impossible to distinguish anything, either laughter, songs or cries.

"What do you think of it?" asked Desgenais.

"Nothing," I replied. "I have stopped my ears and am looking at it."

In the midst of that bacchanal the beautiful Marco remained mute, drinking nothing and leaning quietly on her bare arm. She seemed neither astonished nor affected by it.

"Do you not wish to do as they?" I asked. "You have just offered me Cyprian wine; why do you not drink some yourself?"

With these words I poured out a large glass full to the brim. She raised it to her lips, and then placed it on the table and resumed her listless attitude.

The more I studied that Marco, the more singular she appeared; she took pleasure in nothing and did not seem to be annoyed by anything. It appeared as difficult to anger her as to please her; she did what was asked of her, but no more. I thought of the genius of eternal repose, and I imagined that if that pale statue should become somnambulant it would resemble Marco.

"Are you good or bad?" I asked. "Are you sad or gay? Are you loved? Do you wish to be loved? Are you fond of money, of pleasure, of what? Horses, the country, balls? What pleases you? Of what are you dreaming?"

To all these questions the same smile on her part, a smile that expressed neither joy nor sor-

row, but which seemed to say, "What does it matter?" and nothing more.

I held my lips to hers; she gave me a listless kiss and then passed her handkerchief over her mouth.

"Marco," I said, "woe to him who loves you."

She turned her dark eyes on me, then turned them upward, and raising her finger with that Italian gesture which can not be imitated, she pronounced that characteristic feminine word of her country:

"*Forse!*"

And then dessert was served. Some of the party had departed, some were smoking, others gambling, and a few still at table; some of the women danced, others slept. The orchestra returned; the candles paled and others were lighted. I recalled a supper of Petronius where the lights went out around the drunken masters, and the slaves entered and stole the silver. All the while songs were being sung in various parts of the room, and three Englishmen, three of those gloomy figures for whom the continent is a hospital, kept up a most sinister ballad that must have been born of the fogs of their marshes.

"Come," said I to Marco, "let us go."

She arose and took my arm.

"To-morrow!" cried Desgenais to me, as we left the hall.

When approaching Marco's house, my heart

beat violently and I could not speak. I could not understand such a woman; she seemed to experience neither desire nor disgust, and could think of nothing but the fact that my hand was trembling and hers motionless.

Her room was, like her, somber and voluptuous; it was dimly lighted by an alabaster lamp. The chairs and sofa were as soft as beds, and there was everywhere suggestion of down and silk. Upon entering I was struck with the strong odor of Turkish pastilles, not such as are sold here on the streets, but those of Constantinople, which are more nervous and more dangerous. She rang and a maid appeared. She entered an alcove without a word, and a few minutes later I saw her leaning on her elbow in her habitual attitude of nonchalance.

I stood looking at her. Strange to say, the more I admired her, the more beautiful I found her, the more rapidly I felt my desires subside. I do not know whether it was some magnetic influence or her silence and listlessness. I lay down on a sofa opposite the alcove and the coldness of death settled on my soul.

The pulsation of the blood in the arteries is a sort of clock, the ticking of which can be heard only at night. Man, abandoned by exterior objects, falls back upon himself; he hears himself live. In spite of my fatigue I could not close my eyes; those of Marco were fixed on me; we

looked at each other in silence, gently, so to speak.

"What are you doing there?" she asked.

She heaved a gentle sigh that was almost a plaint. I turned my head and saw that first gleams of morning light were shining through the window.

I arose and opened the window; a bright light penetrated every corner of the room. The sky was clear.

I motioned to her to wait. Considerations of prudence had led her to choose an apartment some distance from the center of the city; perhaps she had other quarters, for she sometimes received a number of visitors. Her lover's friends sometimes visited her, and this room was doubtless only a *petite maison;* it overlooked the Luxembourg, the garden of which extended as far as my eye could reach.

As a cork held under water seems restless under the hand which holds it, and slips through the fingers to rise to the surface, thus there stirred in me a sentiment that I could neither overcome nor escape. The garden of the Luxembourg made my heart leap and banished every other thought. How many times had I stretched out on one of those little mounds, a sort of sylvan school, while I read in the cool shade some book filled with foolish poetry! For such, alas! were the debauches of my childhood. I saw

many souvenirs of the past among those leafless trees and faded lawns. There, when ten years of age, I had walked with my brother and my tutor, throwing bits of bread to some of the poor benumbed birds; there, seated under a tree, I had watched a group of little girls as they danced; I felt my heart beat in unison with the refrain of their childish song; there, returning from school, I had followed a thousand times the same path, lost in contemplation of some verse of Virgil and kicking the pebbles at my feet. "Oh! my childhood! You are there!" I cried. "O, Heaven! now I am here."

I turned around. Marco was asleep, the lamp had gone out, the light of day had changed the aspect of the room; the hangings, which had at first appeared blue, were now a faded yellow, and Marco, the beautiful statue, was livid as death.

I shuddered in spite of myself; I looked at the alcove, then at the garden; my head became drowsy and fell on my breast. I sat down before an open secretary near one of the windows. A piece of paper caught my eye; it was an open letter, and I looked at it mechanically. I read it several times before I thought what I was doing. Suddenly a gleam of intelligence came to me, although I could not understand everything. I picked up the paper and read what follows, written in an unskilled hand and filled with errors in spelling:

"She died yesterday. She began to fail at twelve, the night before. She called me and said: 'Louison, I am going to join my companion; go to the closet and take down the cloth that hangs on a nail; it is the mate of the other.' I fell on my knees and wept, but she took my hand and said: 'Do not weep, do not weep!' And she heaved such a sigh——"

The rest was torn. I can not describe the impression, that sad letter made on me; I turned it over and saw on the other side Marco's address and the date, that of the evening previous.

"Is she dead? Who is dead?" I cried, going to the alcove. "Dead! Who?"

Marco opened her eyes. She saw me with the letter in my hand.

"It is my mother," she said, "who is dead. You are not coming?"

As she spoke she extended her hand.

"Silence!" I said; "sleep and leave me to myself."

She turned over and went to sleep. I looked at her for some time to assure myself that she would not hear me, and then quietly left the house.

CHAPTER V

One evening I was seated by the fire with Desgenais. The window was open; it was one of the early days in March, a harbinger of spring. It had been raining and a sweet odor came from the garden.

"What shall we do this spring?" I asked. "I do not care to travel."

"I shall do what I did last year," replied Desgenais. "I shall go to the country when the time comes."

"What!" I replied. "Do you do the same thing every year? Are you going to begin life over again this year?"

"What would you expect me to do?"

"What would I expect you to do?" I cried, jumping to my feet. "That is just like you. Ah! Desgenais, how all this wearies me! Do you never tire of this sort of life?"

"No," he replied.

I was standing before an engraving of the Madeleine. Involuntarily I joined my hands.

"What are you doing?" asked Desgenais.

"If I were an artist," I replied, "and wished to represent Melancholy, I would not paint a dreamy girl with a book in her hands."

"What is the matter with you this evening?" he asked, smiling.

"No, in truth," I continued, "that Madeleine, in tears, has the spark of hope in her bosom; that pale and sickly hand on which she supports her head, is still sweet with the perfume with which she anointed the feet of her Lord. You do not understand that in that desert there are thinking people who pray. This is not Melancholy."

"It is a woman who reads," he replied dryly.

"And a happy woman," I continued, "and a happy book."

Desgenais understood me; he saw that a profound sadness had taken possession of me. He asked if I had some secret cause of sorrow. I hesitated, but did not reply.

"My dear Octave," he said, "if you have any trouble, do not hesitate to confide in me. Speak freely and you will find that I am your friend!"

"I know it," I replied, "I know I have a friend; that is not my trouble."

He urged me to explain.

"But what will it avail," I asked, "since neither of us can help matters? Do you want the bottom of my heart or merely a word and an excuse?"

"Be frank!" he said.

"Very well," I replied, "you have seen fit to give me advice in the past and now I ask you to listen to me as I have listened to you. You

ask what is in my heart and I am about to tell you.

"Take the first comer and say to him: 'Here are people who pass their lives drinking, riding, laughing, gambling, enjoying all kinds of pleasures; no barrier restrains them, their law is their pleasure, women are their playthings; they are rich. They have no cares, not one. All their days are days of feasting.' What do you think of it? Unless that man happened to be a severe bigot he would probably reply that that was the greatest happiness that could be imagined.

"Then take that man into the thick of the action, place him at a table with a woman on either side, a glass in his hand, a handful of gold every morning and say to him: 'This is your life. While you sleep near your mistress, your horses neigh in the stables; while you drive your horses along the boulevards, your wines are ripening in your vaults; while you pass away the night drinking, the bankers are increasing your wealth. You have but to express a wish and your desires are gratified. You are the happiest of men. But take care lest some night of carousal you drink too much and destroy the capacity of your body for enjoyment. That would be a serious misfortune, for all the ills that afflict human flesh can be cured, except that. You ride some night through

the woods with joyous companions; your horse falls and you are thrown into a ditch filled with mud, and it may be that your companions, in the midst of their happy fanfares, will not hear your cry of anguish; it may be that the sound of their trumpets will die away in the distance while you drag your broken limbs through the deserted forest. Some night you will lose at the gaming table; Fortune has its bad days. When you return to your home and are seated before the fire, do not strike your forehead with your hands, and do not allow sorrow to moisten your cheeks with tears, do not bitterly cast your eyes about here and there as though seeking for a friend; do not, under any circumstances, think of those who, under some thatched roof, enjoy a tranquil life and who sleep holding each other by the hand; for before you, on your luxurious bed, will sit a pale creature who loves—your money. You will seek from her consolation for your grief, and she will remark that you are very sad and ask if your loss was considerable; the tears from your eyes will concern her deeply, for they may be the cause of allowing her dress to grow old or the rings to drop from her fingers. Do not name him who won your money that night for she may meet him on the morrow, and she may make sweet eyes at him that would destroy your remaining happiness. That is what is to be expected of human frailty;

have you the strength to endure it? Are you a man? Beware of disgust, it is an incurable evil; death is more to be desired than a living distaste for life. Have you a heart? Beware of love, for it is worse than disease for a debauchee and it is ridiculous. Debauchees pay their mistresses, and the woman who sells herself has no right but that of contempt for the purchaser. Are you passionate? Take care of your face. It is shameful for a soldier to throw down his arms and for a debauchee to appear to hold to anything; his glory consists in touching nothing except with hands of marble that have been bathed in oil in order that nothing may stick to them. Are you hot-headed? If you desire to live, learn how to kill, for wine is a wrangler. Have you a conscience? Take care of your slumber, for a debauchee who repents too late is like a ship that leaks: it can neither return to land nor continue on its course; the winds can with difficulty move it, the ocean yawns for it, it careens and disappears. If you have a body, look out for suffering; if you have a soul, despair awaits you. O, unhappy one! beware of men; while they walk along the same path with you, you will seem to see a vast plain strewn with garlands where a happy throng of dancers trip the gladsome *furandole* standing in a circle, each a link in an endless chain; it is but a mirage; those who look down know that

they are dancing on a silken thread stretched over an abyss that swallows up all who fall and shows not even a ripple on its surface. What foot is sure? Nature herself seems to deny you her divine consolation; trees and flowers are yours no more; you have broken your mother's laws, you are no longer one of her foster-children, the birds of the field become silent when you appear. You are alone! Beware of God! You are face to face with Him, standing like a cold statue upon the pedestal of will. The rain from heaven no longer refreshes you, it undermines and weakens you. The passing wind no longer gives you the kiss of life, the benediction on all that lives and breathes; it buffets you and makes you stagger. Every woman who kisses you, takes from you a spark of life and gives you none in return; you exhaust yourself on fantoms; wherever falls a drop of our sweat, there springs up one of those sinister weeds that grow in graveyards. Die! You are the enemy of all who love; blot yourself from the face of the earth, do not wait for old age; do not leave a child behind you, do not fecundate a drop of your corrupted blood; vanish as does the smoke, do not deprive a single blade of living grass of a ray of sunlight!' "

When I had spoken these words, I fell back in my chair and a flood of tears streamed from my eyes.

"Ah! Desgenais," I cried, sobbing, "this is not what you told me. Did you not know it? And if you did, why did you not tell me of it?"

But Desgenais sat still with folded hands; he was as pale as a shroud and a long tear trickled down his cheek.

A moment of silence ensued. The clock struck; I suddenly remembered that it was this hour and this day, one year ago, that my mistress deceived me.

"Do you hear that clock?" I cried, "do you hear it? I do not know what it means at this moment, but it is a terrible hour and one that will count in my life."

I was beside myself and scarcely knew what I was saying. But that instant a servant rushed into the room; he took my hand and led me aside, whispering in my ear:

"Sir, I have come to inform you that your father is dying; he has just been seized with an attack of apoplexy and the physicians despair of his life."

PART III

CHAPTER I

My father lived in the country, some miles from Paris. When I arrived, I found a physician at the door who said to me:

"You are too late; your father expressed a desire to see you before he died."

I entered and saw my father dead. "Sir," I said to the physician, "please have every one retire that I may be alone here; my father had something to say to me, and he will say it."

In obedience to my order the servants left the room. I approached the bed and raised the shroud which already covered the face. But when my eyes fell on that face, I stooped to kiss it and lost consciousness.

When I recovered, I heard some one say:

"If he requests it, you must refuse him on some pretext or other."

I understood that they wanted to get me away from the bed of death and so I feigned that I had heard nothing. When they saw that I was resting quietly, they left me. I waited until the house was quiet and then took a can-

dle and made my way to my father's room. I found there a young priest seated near the bed.

"Sir," I said, "to dispute with an orphan the last vigil at a father's side, is a bold enterprise. I do not know what your orders may be. You may remain in the adjoining room; if anything happens, I alone am responsible."

He retired. A single candle on the table shone on the bed. I sat down in the chair the priest had just left and again uncovered those features I was to see for the last time.

"What do you wish to say to me, father?" I asked. "What was your last thought concerning your child?"

My father had a book in which he was accustomed to write from day to day the record of his life. That book lay on the table and I saw that it was open; I kneeled before it; on the open page were these words and no more:

"Adieu, my son, I love you and I die."

I did not shed a tear, not a sob came from my lips; my throat was swollen and my mouth sealed; I looked at my father without moving.

He knew my life, and my irregularities had caused him much sorrow and anxiety. He did not refer to my future, to my youth and my follies. His advice had often saved me from some evil course, and had influenced my entire life, for his life had been one of singular virtue and kindness. I supposed that before dying he

wished to see me, to try once more to turn me from the path of error; but death had come too swiftly; he felt that he could express all he had to say in one word and he wrote in his book that he loved me.

CHAPTER II

A SMALL wooden railing was placed around my father's grave. According to his expressed wish, he was buried in the village cemetery. Every day I visited his tomb and passed part of the day on a little bench in the interior of the vault. The rest of the time I lived alone in the house in which he died and I kept with me only one servant.

Whatever sorrows the passions may cause, the woes of life are not to be compared with those of death. My first thought, as I sat beside my father's bedside, was that I was a helpless child, knowing nothing, understanding nothing; I can not say that my heart felt physical pain, but I sometimes bent over and wrung my hands as one who wakens from a long sleep.

During the first months of my life in the country I had no thought of either the past or the future. It did not seem to be I who had lived up to that time; what I felt was not despair, and in no way resembled the terrible grief

I had experienced in the past; there was a sort of languor in every action, a sense of fatigue with all of life, a poignant bitterness that was eating out my heart. I held a book in my hand all day long but I did not read, I did not even know what I dreamed about. I had no thoughts; within, all was silence; I had received such a violent blow, and yet one that was so prolonged in its effect, that I remained a purely passive being and there seemed to be no reaction.

My servant, Larive by name, had been much attached to my father; he was, after my father himself, probably the best man I have ever known. He was the same height and wore the clothes my father had left him, having no livery.

He was about the same age, that is, his hair was turning gray, and during the twenty years he had lived with my father, he had learned some of his ways. While I was pacing up and down the room after dinner, I heard him doing the same in the hall; although the door was open, he did not enter and not a word was spoken; but from time to time we would look at each other and weep. The entire evening would pass thus, and it would be late in the night before I would ask for a light, or get one myself.

Everything about the house was left unchanged, not a piece of paper was moved. The great leather armchair in which my father sat, stood near the fire; his table and his books, just

as he left them; I respected even the dust on these articles, which in life, he never liked to see disturbed. The walls of that solitary house, accustomed to silence and the most tranquil life, seemed to look down on me in pity as I sat in my father's chair, enveloped in his dressing-gown. A feeble voice seemed to whisper: "Where is the father? It is plain to see that this is an orphan."

I received several letters from Paris and replied to each that I desired to pass the summer alone in the country, as my father was accustomed to do. I began to realize that in all evil there is some good, and that sorrow, whatever else may be said of it, is a means of repose. Whatever the message brought by those who are sent by God, they always accomplish the happy result of awakening us from the sleep of the world, and when they speak, all are silent. Passing sorrows blaspheme and accuse Heaven; great sorrows neither accuse nor blaspheme, they listen.

In the morning, I passed entire hours in the contemplation of nature. My windows overlooked a valley in the midst of which arose the village steeple; all was plain and calm. Spring, with its budding leaves and flowers, did not produce on me the sinister effect of which the poets speak, who find in the contrasts of life the mockery of death. I looked upon that frivolous idea,

if it was serious and not a simple antithesis made in pleasantry, as the conceit of a heart that has known no real experience. The gambler who leaves the table at break of day, his eyes burning and hands empty, may feel that he is at war with nature like the torch at some hideous vigil; but what can the budding leaves say to a child who mourns a lost father? The tears of his eyes are sisters of the rose; the leaves of the willow are themselves tears. It is when I look at the sky, the woods and the prairies, that I understand men who seek consolation.

Larive had no more desire to console me than to console himself. At the time of my father's death he feared I would sell the property and take him to Paris. I did not know what he had learned of my past life, but I had noticed his anxiety, and, when he saw me settle down in the old home, he gave me a glance that went to my heart. One day I had a large portrait of my father sent from Paris, and placed it in the dining-room. When Larive entered the room to serve me, he saw it; he hesitated, looked at the portrait, and then at me, in his eyes there shone a melancholy joy that I could not fail to understand. It seemed to say: "What happiness! We are to suffer here in peace!"

I gave him my hand which he covered with tears and kisses.

He looked upon my grief as the mistress of

his own. When I visited my father's tomb in the morning I found him there watering the flowers; when he saw me he went away and returned home. He followed me in my rambles; when I was on my horse I did not expect him to follow me, but when I saw him trudging down the valley, wiping the sweat from his brow, I bought a small horse from a peasant and gave it to him; thus we rode through the woods together.

In the village were some people of our acquaintance who frequently visited my father. My door was closed to them, although I regretted it; but I could not see any one, with patience. Some time, when sure to be free from interruption, I hoped to examine my father's papers. Finally, Larive brought them to me, and untying the package with trembling hand, spread them before me.

Upon reading the first pages, I felt in my heart that vivifying freshness that characterizes the air near a lake of cool water; the sweet serenity of my father's soul exhaled as a perfume from the dusty leaves I was unfolding. The journal of his life lay open before me; I could count the diurnal throbbings of that noble heart. I began to yield to the influence of a dream that was both sweet and profound, and in spite of the serious firmness of his character, I discovered an ineffable grace, the flower of

kindness. While I read, the recollection of his death mingled with the narrative of his life, I can not tell with what sadness I followed that limpid stream until its waters mingled with those of the ocean.

" Oh! just man," I cried, " fearless and stainless! what candor in thy experience! Thy devotion to thy friends, thy admiration for nature, thy sublime love of God, this is thy life, there is no place in thy heart for anything else. The spotless snow on the mountain's summit is not more pure than thy saintly old age, thy white hair resembles it. Oh! father, father! Give thy snowy locks to me, they are younger than my blond head. Let me live and die as thou hast lived and died. I wish to plant in the soil over your grave the green branch of my young life, I will water it with my tears, and the God of orphans will protect that sacred twig nourished by the grief of youth and the memory of age."

After having read these precious papers I classified them and arranged them in order. I formed a resolution to write a journal myself. I had one made just like that of my father's, and, carefully searching out the minor details of his life, I tried to conform my life to his. Thus whenever I heard the clock strike the hour, tears came to my eyes: " This," said I, " is what my father did at this hour," and whether it was

reading, walking, or eating, I never failed to follow his example. Thus I accustomed myself to a calm and regular life; there was an indefinable charm about this orderly life that did me good. I went to bed with a sense of comfort and happiness, such as I had not known for a long time. My father spent much of his time about the garden; the rest of the day was devoted to walking and study, a nice adjustment of bodily and mental exercise.

At the same time, I followed his example in doing little acts of benevolence among the unfortunate. I began to search for those who were in need of my assistance, and there were many of them in the valley. I soon became known among the poor; my message to them was: "When the heart is good, sorrow is sacred!" For the first time in my life I was happy, God blessed my tears, and sorrow taught me virtue.

CHAPTER III

One evening, as I was walking under a row of linden-trees on the outskirts of the village, I saw a young woman come from a house some distance from the road. She was dressed simply and veiled so that I could not see her face; but her form and her carriage seemed so charming that I followed her with my eyes for some

time. As she was crossing a field, a white goat, running at liberty through the grass, ran to her side; she caressed it softly, and looked about as though searching for some favorite herb to feed it. I saw near me some wild mulberry; I plucked a branch and stepped up to her holding it in my hand. The goat watched my approach with apprehension; he was afraid to take the branch from my hand. His mistress made a sign as though to encourage him, but he looked at her with an air of anxiety; she then took the branch from my hand and the goat promptly accepted it from hers. I bowed, and she passed on her way.

On my return home, I asked Larive if he knew who lived in the house I described to him; it was a small house, modest in appearance, with a garden. He recognized it; there were but two people in the house, an old woman who was very religious, and a young woman whose name was Madame Pierson. It was she I had seen. I asked him who she was and if she ever came to see my father. He replied that she was a widow, that she led a retired life, and that she had visited my father, but rarely. When I had learned all he knew, I returned to the lindens and sat down on a bench.

I do not know what feeling of sadness came over me as I saw the goat approaching me. I arose from my seat, and, for distraction, I fol-

lowed the path I had seen Madame Pierson take, a path that led to the mountains.

It was nearly eleven in the evening before I thought of returning; as I had walked some distance, I directed my steps toward a farm-house, intending to ask for some milk and bread. Drops of rain began to splash at my feet, announcing a thunder-shower which I was anxious to escape. Although there was a light in the house and I could hear the sound of feet going and coming through the house, no one responded to my knock, and I walked around to one of the windows to ascertain if there was any one within.

I saw a bright fire burning in the lower hall; the farmer, whom I knew, was sitting near his bed; I knocked on the window-pane and called to him. Just then the door opened and I was surprised to see Madame Pierson, who inquired who was there.

I waited a moment, in order to conceal my astonishment. I then entered the house and asked permission to remain until the storm should pass. I could not imagine what she was doing at such an hour in this deserted spot; suddenly, I heard a plaintive voice from the bed, and turning my head, I saw the farmer's wife lying there with the mark of death on her face.

Madame Pierson, who had followed me, sat down before the old man who was bowed down with sorrow; she made me a sign to make no

noise as the sick woman was sleeping. I took a chair and sat in a corner until the storm passed.

While I sat there, I saw her rise from time to time and whisper something to the farmer. One of the children, whom I took upon my knee, said that she came every night since the mother's illness. She performed the duties of a sister of charity—there was no one else in the country who could do it; there was but one physician, and he was very inferior.

"That is Brigitte la Rose," said the child; "do you not know her?"

"No," I replied in a low voice. "Why do you call her by such a name?"

He replied that he did not know, unless it was because she had been rosy and the name had clung to her.

As Madame Pierson had laid aside her veil, I could see her face; when the child left me I raised my head. She was standing near the bed, holding in her hand a cup which she was offering the sick woman, who had awakened. She appeared to be pale and thin; her hair was ashen blond. Her beauty was not of the regular type. How shall I express it? Her large, dark eyes were fixed on those of her patient, and those eyes, that shone with approaching death, returned her gaze. There was, in that simple exchange of kindness and gratitude, a beauty that can not be described.

The rain was falling in torrents; a heavy darkness settled over the lonely mountain-side, pierced by occasional flashes of lightning. The noise of the storm, the roaring of the wind, the wrath of the unchained elements, made a deep contrast with the religious calm which prevailed in the little cottage. I looked at the wretched bed, at the broken windows, the puffs of smoke forced from the fire by the tempest, I observed the helpless despair of the farmer, the superstitious terror of the children, the fury of the elements besieging the bed of death; and when, in the midst of all that, I saw that gentle, pale-faced woman, going and coming, bravely meeting the duties of the moment regardless of the tempest, and of our presence, it seemed to me there was in that calm performance something more serene than the most cloudless sky, and that there was something superhuman about this woman who, surrounded by such horrors, did not for an instant, lose her faith in God.

What woman is this, I wondered; whence comes she and how long has she been here? A long time since, they remember when her cheeks were rosy. How is it I have never heard of her? She comes to this spot alone, and at this hour? Yes, she has traversed these mountains and valleys through storm and fair weather, she goes hither and thither, bearing life and hope wherever they fail, holding in her hand that fragile

cup, caressing her goat as she passes. And this is what has been going on in this valley while I have been dining and gambling; she was probably born here, and will be buried in a corner of the cemetery, by the side of her father. Thus will that obscure woman die, a woman of whom no one speaks and of whom the children say: "Do you not know her?"

I can not express what I experienced; I sat quietly in my corner, scarcely breathing, and it seemed to me that if I had tried to assist her, if I had reached out my hand to spare her a single step, I would have been guilty of sacrilege, I would have touched sacred vessels.

The storm lasted two hours. When it subsided, the sick woman sat up in her bed and said that she felt better, that the medicine she had taken had done her good. The children ran to the bedside, looking up into their mother's face with great eyes that expressed both surprise and joy.

"I am very sure you are well," said the husband, who had not stirred from his seat, "for we have had a mass celebrated, and it cost us a large sum."

At that coarse and stupid expression, I glanced at Madame Pierson; her swollen eyes, her pallor, her attitude, all clearly expressed fatigue and the exhaustion of long vigils.

"Ah! my poor man!" said the farmer's wife, "may God reward you!"

I could hardly contain myself, I was so angered by the stupidity of these brutes who were capable of crediting the work of charity to the avarice of a curé. I was about to reproach them for their ingratitude and treat them as they deserved, when Madame Pierson took one of the children in her arms and said with a smile:

"You may kiss your mother, for she is saved."

I stopped when I heard these words.

Never, was the naive contentment of a happy and benevolent heart painted in such beauty on so sweet a face. Fatigue and pallor seemed to be gone, she became radiant with joy.

A few minutes later, Madame Pierson told the children to call the farmer's boy to conduct her home. I advanced to offer my services; I told her that it was useless to awaken the boy as I was going in the same direction, and that she would do me an honor by accepting my offer. She asked me if I was not Octave de T——.

I replied that I was, and that she doubtless remembered my father. It struck me as strange that she should smile at that question; she cheerfully accepted my arm and we set out on our return.

CHAPTER IV

We walked along without a word; the wind was lowering; the trees quivered gently, shaking the rain from the boughs. Some distant flashes of lightning could still be seen; the perfume of humid verdure filled the warm air. The sky soon cleared and the moon illumined the mountain.

I could not help thinking of the freakishness of chance, which had seen fit to make me the solitary companion of a woman, of whose existence I knew nothing a few hours before. She had accepted me as her escort on account of the name I bore, and leaned on my arm with quiet confidence. In spite of her distracted air, it seemed to me that this confidence was either very bold or very simple; and she must needs be either the one or the other, for at each step, I felt my heart becoming at once proud and innocent.

We spoke of the sick woman she had just left, of the scenes along the route; it did not occur to us to ask the questions incident to a new acquaintance. She spoke to me of my father, and always in the same tone I had noted when I first revealed my name—that is, cheerfully, almost gaily. By degrees, I thought I understood why she did this, observing that she spoke thus of all, both living and dead, of life and of suffering

and death. It was because human sorrows had taught her nothing that could accuse God, and I felt the piety of her smile.

I told her of the solitary life I was leading. Her aunt, she said, had seen more of my father than she, as they sometimes played cards together after dinner. She urged me to visit them, assuring me a welcome.

When about half-way home, she complained of fatigue and sat down to rest on a bench that the heavy foliage had protected from the rain. I stood before her and watched the pale light of the moon playing on her face. After a moment's silence, she arose and in a constrained manner observed:

"Of what are you thinking? It is time for us to think of returning."

"I was wondering," I replied, "why God created you, and I was saying to myself that it was for the sake of those who suffer."

"That is an expression, which, coming from you, I can not look upon except as a compliment."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you appear to be very young."

"It sometimes happens," I said, "that one is older than the face would seem to indicate."

"Yes," she replied, smiling, "and it sometimes happens that one is younger than his words would seem to indicate."

"Have you no faith in experience?"

"I know that it is the name most young men give to their follies and their disappointments; what can one know at your age?"

"Madame, a man of twenty may know more than a woman of thirty. The liberty which men enjoy, enables them to see more of life and its experiences than women; they go wherever they please and no barrier restrains them; they test life in all its phases. When inspired by hope, they press forward to achievement; what they will, they accomplish. When they have reached the end, they return; hope has been lost on the route, and happiness has broken its word."

As I was speaking, we reached the summit of a little hill which sloped down to the valley; Madame Pierson, yielding to the downward tendency, began to trip lightly down the incline. Without knowing why, I did the same, and we ran down the hill, arm in arm; the long grass under our feet retarded our progress. Finally, like two birds, spent with flight, we reached the foot of the mountain.

"Behold!" cried Madame Pierson, "just a short time ago I was tired, but now I am rested. And, believe me," she added, with a charming smile, "you should treat your experience as I have treated my fatigue. We have made good time and will enjoy supper the more on that account."

CHAPTER V

I WENT to call upon her the next morning. I found her at the piano, her old aunt at the window sewing, the little room filled with flowers, the sunlight streaming through the blinds, a large bird-cage at her side.

I expected to find her somewhat religious, at least one of those women of the provinces who know nothing of what happens two leagues away, and who live in a certain narrow circle from which they never escape. I confess that such isolated life, which is found here and there in small towns, under a thousand unknown roofs, had always produced on me the effect of stagnant pools of water; the air does not seem respirable: in everything on earth that is forgotten, there is something of death.

On Madame Pierson's table were some papers and new books; they looked as though they had not been more than touched. In spite of the simplicity of everything around her, of furniture and dress, it was easy to recognize mode, that is to say, life; she did not live for this alone, but that goes without saying. What struck me in her taste was, that there was nothing bizarre, everything breathed of youth and pleasantness. Her conversation indicated a finished education; there was no subject on which she could not

speak well and with ease. While admitting that she was naive, it was evident that she was at the same time profound in thought and fertile in resource; an intelligence, at once broad and free, soared gently over a simple heart and over the habits of a retired life. The sea-swallow, whirling through the azure heavens, soars thus over the blade of grass that marks its nest.

We talked of literature, music, and even politics. She had visited Paris during the winter; from time to time, she dipped into the world; what she saw there served as a basis for what she divined.

But her distinguishing trait was gaiety, a cheerfulness that, while not exactly joy itself, was constant and unalterable; it might be said that she was born a flower, and that her perfume was gaiety.

Her pallor, her large dark eyes, her manner at certain moments, all led me to believe that she had suffered. I know not what it was that seemed to say that the sweet serenity of her brow was not of this world, but had come from God, and that she would return it to him spotless in spite of man; and there were times when she reminded one of the careful housewife, who, when the wind blows, holds her hand before the candle.

When I had been in the house half an hour, I could not help saying what was in my heart.

I thought of my past life, of my disappointment and my ennui; I walked to and fro, breathing the fragrance of the flowers, and looking at the sun. I asked her to sing, and she did so with good grace. In the meantime, I leaned on the window sill and watched the birds flitting about the garden. A saying of Montaigne's came into my head: "I neither love nor esteem sadness although the world has invested it, at a given price, with the honor of its particular favor. They dress up in it wisdom, virtue, conscience. Stupid and absurd adornment."

"What happiness!" I cried in spite of myself. "What repose! What joy! What forgetfulness of self!"

The good aunt raised her head and looked at me with an air of astonishment; Madame Pierson stopped short. I became red as fire when conscious of my folly, and sat down without a word.

We went out into the garden. The white goat I had seen the evening before was lying in the grass; it came up to her and followed us about the garden.

When we reached the end of the garden walk, a large young man with a pale face, clad in a kind of black cassock, suddenly appeared at the railing. He entered without knocking, and bowed to Madame Pierson; it seemed to me that his face, which I considered a bad omen, dark-

ened a little when he saw me. He was a priest I had often seen in the village, and his name was Mercanson; he came from St. Sulpice and was related to the curé of the parish.

He was large and at the same time pale, a thing which always displeased me and which is, in fact, unpleasant; it impresses one as a sort of diseased healthfulness. Moreover, he had the slow yet jerky way of speaking that characterizes the pedant. Even his manner of walking, which was not that of youth and health, repelled me; as for his glance, it might be said that he had none. I do not know what to think of a man whose eyes have nothing to say. These are the signs which led to an unfavorable opinion of Mercanson, an opinion which was unfortunately correct.

He sat down on a bench and began to talk about Paris, which he called the modern Babylon. He had been there, he knew every one; he knew Madame de B——, who was an angel; he had preached sermons in her salon and was listened to on bended knee. (The worst of this was, that it was true.) One of his friends, who had introduced him there, had been expelled from school for having seduced a girl; a terrible thing to do, very sad. He paid Madame Pierson a thousand compliments for her charitable deeds throughout the country; he had heard of her benefactions, her care for the sick, her vigils

at the bed of suffering and of death. It was very beautiful and noble; he would not fail to speak of it at St. Sulpice. Did he not seem to say that he would not fail to speak of it to God?

Wearied by this harangue, in order to conceal my rising disgust, I sat down on the grass and began to play with the goat. Mercanson turned on me his dull and lifeless eye:

"The celebrated Vergniand," said he, "was afflicted with that mania of sitting on the ground and playing with animals."

"It is a mania," I replied, very innocently. "If there were none others, the world would get along without so much meddling on the part of others."

My reply did not please him; he frowned and changed the subject. He was charged with a commission; his uncle, the curé, had spoken to him of a poor devil who was unable to earn his daily bread. He lived in such and such a place; he had been there himself and was interested in him; he hoped that Madame Pierson——

I was looking at her while he was speaking, wondering what reply she would make and hoping she would say something in order to drown out the memory of the priest's voice with her gentle tones. She merely bowed, and he retired.

When he had gone our gaiety returned. We entered a greenhouse in the rear of the garden.

Madame Pierson treated her flowers as she

did her birds and her peasants, everything about her must be well cared for, each flower must have its drop of water and ray of sunlight in order that she might be gay and happy as an angel; so nothing could be in better condition than her little greenhouse. When we had made the round of the building she said:

"This is my little world; you have seen all I possess, and my domain ends here."

"Madame," I said, "as my father's name has secured for me the favor of admittance here, permit me to return and I will believe that happiness has not entirely forgotten me."

She extended her hand and I touched it with respect, not daring to raise it to my lips.

I returned home, closed my door and retired. There danced before my eyes a little white house; I saw myself walking through the village and knocking at the garden gate. "Oh! my poor heart!" I cried. "God be praised, you are still young, you are still capable of life and of love!"

One evening I was with Madame Pierson. More than three months had passed, during which I had seen her almost every day; and what can I say of that time except that I saw her? "To be with those we love," said Bruyêre, "suffices; to dream, to talk to them, not to talk to them, to think of them, to think of the most indifferent things, but to be near them, it is all the same."

I loved. During the three months we had taken many long walks; I was initiated into the mysteries of her modest charity; we passed through dark streets, she on her little horse, I on foot, a small stick in my hand; thus, half conversing, half dreaming, we knocked at the doors of cottages. There was a little bench near the edge of the wood where I was accustomed to rest after dinner; we met here regularly as though by chance. In the morning, music, reading; in the evening, cards with the aunt as in the days of my father; and she, always there smiling, her presence filling my heart. By what road, O Providence! have you led me? What irrevocable destiny am I to accomplish? What! a life so free, an intimacy so charming, so much repose, such buoyant hope! O God! Of what do men complain? What is there sweeter than love?

To live, yes, to feel intensely, profoundly, that one exists, that one is man, created by God, that is the first, the greatest gift of love. We can not deny, however, that love is a mystery, inexplicable, profound. With all the chains, with all the pains, and I may even say, with all the disgust with which the world has surrounded it, buried as it is under a mountain of prejudices which distort and deprave it, in spite of all the ordure through which it has been dragged, love, eternal and fatal love, is none

the less a celestial law as powerful and as incomprehensible as that which suspends the sun in the heavens. What is this mysterious bond, stronger and more durable than iron, that can neither be seen nor touched? What is there in meeting a woman, in looking at her, in speaking one word to her, and then never forgetting her? Why this one rather than that one? Invoke the aid of reason, or habit, of the senses, the head, the heart, and explain it if you can. You will find nothing but two bodies, one here, the other there, and between them, what? Air, space, immensity. O fools! who fondly imagine yourselves men, and who reason of love! Have you talked with it? No, you have felt it. You have exchanged a glance with a passing stranger, and suddenly there flies out from you something that can not be defined, that has no name known to man. You have taken root in the ground like the seed concealed in the blade of grass which feels the motion of life, and which is on its way to the harvest.

We were alone, the window was open, the murmur of a little fountain came to us from the garden. O God! would that I could count, drop by drop, all the water that fell while we were sitting there, while she was talking and I was responding. It was there that I became intoxicated with her to the point of madness.

It is said that there is nothing so rapid as a

feeling of antipathy, but I believe that the road to love is more swiftly traversed. Of what avail are words spoken with the lips when hearts listen and respond? What sweetness in the glance of a woman who begins to attract you! At first it seems as though everything that passes between you is timid and tentative, but soon there is born a strange joy, and echo answers the voice of love; the thrill of a dual life is felt. What a touch! What a strange attraction! And when love is sure of itself and recognizes fraternity in the object beloved, what serenity in the soul! Words die on the lips, for each one knows what the other is about to say before utterance has shaped the thought. Souls expand, lips are silent. Oh! what silence! What forgetfulness of all!

Although my love began the first day and had since grown to excess, the respect I felt for Madame Pierson sealed my lips. If she had been less frank in permitting me to become her friend, perhaps I would have been more bold, for she had made such a strong impression on me, that I never quitted her without transports of love. But there was something in her frankness and the confidence she placed in me, that checked me; moreover, it was in my father's name that I had been treated as a friend. That consideration rendered me still more respectful and I resolved to prove worthy of that name.

To talk of love, they say, is to make love. We rarely spoke of it. Every time I happened to touch the subject Madame Pierson led the conversation to some other topic. I did not discern her motive, but it was not prudery; it seemed to me that at such times her face took on a stern aspect and a wave of feeling, even of suffering, passed over it. As I had never questioned her about her past life and was unwilling to do so, I respected her obvious wishes.

Sunday there was dancing in the village; she was almost always there. On those occasions her toilet, although always simple, was more elegant than usual; there was a flower in her hair, a bright ribbon, or some such bagatelle; but there was something youthful and fresh about her. The dance, which she loved for itself as an amusing exercise, seemed to inspire her with a frolicsome gaiety. Once launched on the floor, it seemed to me she allowed herself more liberty than usual, that there was an unusual familiarity. I did not dance, being still in mourning, but I managed to keep near her, and seeing her in such good humor, I was often tempted to confess my love.

But for some strange reason, whenever I thought of it I was seized with an irresistible feeling of fear; the idea of an avowal was enough to render me serious in the midst of

gaiety. I conceived the idea of writing to her, but burned the letters before half finished.

That evening I dined with her, and looked about me at the many evidences of a tranquil life; I thought of the quiet life that I was leading, of my happiness since I had known her, and said to myself: "Why ask for more? Does not this suffice? Who knows, perhaps God has nothing more for you? If I should tell her that I love her, what would happen? Perhaps she would forbid me the pleasure of seeing her. Would I, in speaking the words, make her happier than she is to-day? Would I be happier myself?"

I was leaning on the piano, and, as I indulged in these reflections, sadness took possession of me. Night was coming on and she lighted a candle; while returning to her seat she noticed a tear in my eye.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

I turned aside my head.

I sought an excuse, but could find none; I was afraid to meet her glance. I arose and stepped to the window. The air was balmy, the moon was rising beyond those lindens where I had first met her. I fell into a profound reverie; I even forgot that she was present and, extending my arms toward heaven, a sob welled up from my heart.

She arose and stood behind me.

"What is it?" she again asked.

I replied that the sight of that valley, stretching out beneath us, had recalled my father's death; I took leave of her and went out.

Why I decided to silence my love I can not say. Nevertheless, instead of returning home, I began to wander about the woods like a fool. Whenever I found a bench I sat down and then jumped up precipitately. Toward midnight I approached Madame Pierson's house; she was at the window. Seeing her there I began to tremble and tried to retrace my steps, but I was fascinated; I advanced gently and sadly and sat down beneath her window.

I do not know whether she recognized me; I had been there some time when I heard her sweet, fresh voice singing the refrain of a romance, and at the same instant a flower fell on my shoulder. It was a rose she had worn that evening on her bosom; I picked it up and bore it to my lips.

"Who is there at this hour? Is it you?"

She called me by name. The gate leading into the garden was open; I arose without replying and entered it, I stopped before a plot of grass in the center of the garden; I was walking like a somnambulist, without knowing what I was doing.

Suddenly I saw her at the door opening into the garden; she seemed to be undecided and

looked attentively at the rays of the moon. She made a few steps toward me and I advanced to meet her. I could not speak, I fell on my knees before her and seized her hand.

"Listen to me," she said; "I know all; but if it has come to that, Octave, you must go away. You come here every day and you are always welcome, are you not? Is not that enough? What more can I do for you? My friendship you have won; I wish you had been able to keep yours a little longer."

CHAPTER VI

When Madame Pierson had spoken these words, she waited some time as though expecting a reply. As I remained overwhelmed with grief, she gently withdrew her hand, stepped back, waited a moment longer and then reentered the house.

I remained kneeling on the grass. I had been expecting what she said; my resolution was soon taken, and I decided to go away. I arose, my heart bleeding but firm. I looked at the house, at her window; I opened the garden gate and placed my lips on the lock as I passed out.

When I reached home, I told Larive to make what preparations were necessary as I would set

out in the morning. The poor fellow was astonished, but I made him a sign to obey and ask no questions. He brought a large trunk and busied himself with preparations for departure.

It was five o'clock in the morning and day was beginning to break, when I asked myself where I was going. At that thought, which had not occurred to me before, I experienced a profound feeling of discouragement. I cast my eyes over the country, scanning the horizon. A sense of weakness took possession of me; I was exhausted with fatigue. I sat down in a chair and my ideas became confused; I bore my hand to my forehead and found it bathed in sweat. A violent fever made my limbs tremble; I could hardly reach my bed with Larive's assistance. My thoughts were so confused that I had no recollection of what had happened. The day passed; toward evening I heard the sound of instruments. It was the Sunday dance and I asked Larive to go and see if Madame Pierson was there. He did not find her; I sent him to her house. The blinds were closed, and a servant informed him that Madame Pierson and her aunt had gone to spend some days with a relative who lived at N——, a small town some distance north. He handed me a letter that had been given him. It was conceived in the following terms:

"I have known you three months, and for one month have noticed that you feel for me what at your age is called love. I thought I detected on your part a resolution to conceal this from me and conquer yourself. I already esteemed you, this enhanced my respect. I do not reproach you for the past, nor for the weakness of your will.

"What you take for love is nothing more than desire. I am well aware that many women seek to arouse it; it would be better if they did not feel the necessity of pleasing those who approach them; but that vanity is a dangerous thing since I have done wrong in entertaining it with you.

"I am some years older than you and ask you not to try to see me again. It would be vain for you to try to forget the weakness of a moment; but what has passed between us can neither be repeated nor forgotten.

"I do not take leave of you without sorrow; I expect to be absent some time; if, when I return, I find that you have gone away, I will appreciate your action as the final evidence of your friendship and esteem.

"BRIGITTE PIERSON."

CHAPTER VII

THE fever confined me to my bed a week. When I was able to write I assured Madame Pierson that she would be obeyed, and that I would go away. I wrote in good faith, without any intention to deceive, but I was very far from keeping my promise. Before I had gone ten leagues I ordered the driver to stop, and I stepped out of the carriage. I began to walk along the road. I could not resist the temptation to look back at the village which was still visible in the distance. Finally, after a period of frightful irresolution, I felt that it was impossible for me to continue on my route, and rather than get into the carriage again, I would have died on the spot. I told the driver to turn around, and, instead of going to Paris as I had intended, I made straight for N——, whither Madame Pierson had gone.

I arrived at ten in the night. As soon as I reached the inn I had a boy direct me to the house of her relatives, and, without reflecting what I was doing, at once made my way to the spot. A servant opened the door. I asked if Madame Pierson was there and directed him to tell her that some one wished to speak to her on the part of M. Desprez. That was the name of our village curé.

While the servant was executing my order I remained alone in a somber little court; as it was raining, I entered the hall and stood at the foot of the stairway which was not lighted. Madame Pierson soon arrived, preceding the servant; she descended rapidly, and did not see me in the darkness; I stepped up to her and touched her arm. She recoiled with terror and cried out:

"What do you wish of me?"

Her voice trembled so painfully, and when the servant appeared with a light, her face was so pale that I did not know what to think. Was it possible that my unexpected appearance could disturb her in such a manner? That reflection occurred to me, but I decided that it was merely a feeling of fright natural to a woman who is suddenly approached.

Nevertheless, she repeated her question in a firmer tone.

"You must permit me to see you once more," I replied. "I will go away, I will leave the country. You shall be obeyed, I swear it, and that beyond your real desire, for I will sell my father's house and go abroad; but that is only on condition that I am permitted to see you once more; otherwise I remain; you need fear nothing from me, but I am resolved on that."

She frowned and cast her eyes about her in

a strange manner; then she replied, almost graciously:

" Come to-morrow during the day and I will see you." Then she left me.

The next day at noon I presented myself. I was introduced into a room with old hangings and antique furniture. I found her alone, seated on a sofa. I sat down before her.

" Madame," I began, " I come neither to speak of what I suffer, nor to deny that I love you. You have written me that what has passed between us can not be forgotten, and that is true; but you say that on that account we can not meet on the same footing as heretofore, and you are mistaken. I love you, but I have not offended you; nothing is changed in our relations since you do not love me. If I am permitted to see you, responsibility rests with me, and as far as your responsibility is concerned, my love for you should be sufficient guarantee."

She tried to interrupt me.

" Kindly allow me to finish what I have to say. No one knows better than I, that in spite of the respect I feel for you, and in spite of all the protestations by which I might bind myself, love is the stronger. I repeat I do not intend to deny what is in my heart; but you do not learn of that love to-day for the first time, and I ask you what has prevented me from declaring it up to the present time? The fear of

losing you; I was afraid I would not be permitted to see you, and that is what has happened. Make a condition that the first word I shall speak, the first thought or gesture that shall seem to be inconsistent with the most profound respect, shall be the signal for the closing of your door; as I have been silent in the past, I will be silent in the future. You think that I have loved you for a month, when in fact I have loved you from the first day I met you. When you discovered it, you did not refuse to see me on that account. If you had at that time enough esteem for me to believe me incapable of offending you, why have you lost that esteem? That is what I have come to ask you. What have I done? I have bent my knee, but I have not said a word. What have I told you? What you already knew. I have been weak because I have suffered. It is true, madame, that I am twenty years of age and what I have seen of life has only disgusted me, I could use a stronger word; it is true that there is not at this hour on earth, either in the society of men or in solitude, a place, however small and insignificant, that I care to occupy. The space enclosed between the four walls of your garden is the only spot in the world where I live; you are the only human being who has made me love God. I had renounced everything before I knew you; why deprive me of the only ray of light that

Providence has spared me? If it is on account of fear, what have I done to inspire it? If it is on account of pity, in what respect am I culpable? If it is on account of pity and because I suffer, you are mistaken in supposing that I can cure myself; it might have been done, perhaps, two months ago; but I preferred to see you and to suffer, and I do not repent, whatever may come of it. The only misfortune that can reach me, is losing you. Put me to the proof. If I ever feel that there is too much suffering for me in our bargain, I will go away; and you may be sure of it, since you send me away to-day, and I am ready to go. What risk do you run in giving me a month or two of the only happiness I will ever know?"

I waited her reply. She suddenly rose from her seat, then sat down again. Then a moment of silence ensued.

"Rest assured," she said, "it is not so."

I thought she was searching for words that would not appear too severe, and that she was anxious to avoid hurting me.

"One word," I said, rising, "one word, nothing more. I know who you are, and, if there is any compassion for me in your heart, I thank you; speak but one word, this moment decides my life."

She shook her head; I saw that she was hesitating.

"You think I can be cured?" I cried. "May God grant you that solace if you send me away——"

I looked out of the window at the horizon and felt in my soul such a frightful sensation of loneliness at the idea that I was going away, that my blood froze in my veins. She saw me standing before her, my eyes fixed on her, awaiting her reply; all of my life was hanging in suspense upon her lips.

"Very well," she said, "listen to me. This move of yours in coming to see me was an act of great imprudence; however, it is not necessary to assume that you have come here to see me; accept a commission that I will give you for a friend of my family. If you find that it is a little far, let it be the occasion of an absence which shall last as long as you choose, but which must not be too short. Although you said a moment ago," she added with a smile, "that a short trip would calm you. You will stop in the Vosges and you will go as far as Strasburg. Then in a month, or better, in two months you will return and report to me; I will see you again and give you further instructions."

CHAPTER VIII

That evening I received a letter from Madame Pierson, addressed to M. R. D., at Strasburg. Three weeks later my mission had been accomplished and I returned.

While absent, I had thought of nothing but her, and I despaired of ever forgetting her. Nevertheless, I determined to restrain my feelings in her presence; I had suffered too cruelly at the prospect of losing her, to run any further risks. My esteem for her rendered it impossible for me to suspect her sincerity, and I did not see, in her plan for getting me to leave the country, anything that resembled hypocrisy. In a word, I was firmly convinced that at the first word of love her door would be closed to me.

Upon my return, I found her thin and changed. Her habitual smile seemed to languish on her discolored lips. She told me that she had been suffering.

We did not speak of the past. She did not appear to wish to recall it and I had no desire to refer to it. We resumed our old relations of neighbors; yet there was something of constraint between us, a sort of conventional familiarity. It was as though we had said: "It was thus before, let it still be thus." She granted me her confidence, a concession that was not

without its charms for me; but our conversation was colder, for the reason that our eyes expressed as much as our tongues. In all that we said there was more to be surmised than was actually spoken. We no longer endeavored to fathom each other's mind; there was not the same interest attaching to each word, to each sentiment; that curious analysis that characterized our past intercourse; she treated me with kindness, but I distrusted even that kindness; I walked with her in the garden, but no longer accompanied her outside of the premises; we no longer wandered through the woods and valleys; she opened the piano when we were alone; the sound of her voice no longer awakened in my heart those transports of joy which are like sobs that are inspired by hope. When I took leave of her, she gave me her hand, but I was conscious of the fact that it was lifeless; there was much effort in our familiar ease, many reflections in our lightest remarks, much sadness at the bottom of it all.

We felt that there was a third party between us: it was my love for her. My actions never betrayed it, but it appeared in my face: I lost my cheerfulness, my energy, and the color of health that once shone in my cheeks. At the end of one month, I no longer resembled my old self.

And yet in all our conversations I insisted on my disgust with the world, on my aversion

to returning to it. I tried to make Madame Pierson feel that she had no reason to reproach herself for allowing me to see her; I depicted my past life in the most somber colors and gave her to understand that if she should refuse to allow me to see her, she would condemn me to a loneliness worse than death; I told her that I held society in abhorrence and the story of my life, as I recited it, proved my sincerity. So, I affected a cheerfulness that I was far from feeling, in order to show her that in permitting me to see her she had saved me from the most frightful misfortune; I thanked her almost every time I went to see her that I might return in the evening or the following morning. "All my dreams of happiness," said I, "all my hopes, all my ambitions, are enclosed in the little corner of the earth where you dwell; outside of the air that you breathe there is no life for me."

She saw that I was suffering and could not help pitying me. My courage was pathetic, and her every word and gesture shed a sort of tender light over my devotion. She saw the struggle that was going on in me: my obedience flattered her pride, while my pallor awakened her charitable instinct. At times she appeared to be irritated, almost coquettish; she would say in a tone that was almost rebellious: "I shall not be here to-morrow, do not come on such and such a day." Then as I was going away sad, but

resigned, she sweetened the cup of bitterness by adding: "I am not sure of it, come whenever you please;" or her adieu was more friendly than usual, her glance more tender.

"Rest assured that Providence has led me to you," I said. "If I had not met you, I might have relapsed into the irregular life I was leading before I knew you. God has sent you as an angel of light to draw me from the abyss. He has confided a sacred mission to you; who knows, if I should lose you, whither the sorrow that consumes me might lead me, the sad experience I have been through, the terrible combat between my youth and my ennui?"

That thought, sincere enough on my part, had great weight with a woman of lofty devotion whose soul was as pious as it was ardent. It was probably the only consideration that induced Madame Pierson to permit me to see her.

I was preparing to go to see her one day when some one knocked at my door and I saw Mercanson enter, that priest I had met in the garden on the occasion of my first visit. He began to make excuses that were as tiresome as himself for presuming to call on me without having made my acquaintance; I told him that I knew him very well as the nephew of our curé, and asked what I could do for him.

He turned uneasily from one side to another with an air of constraint, searching for phrases

and fingering everything on the table before him as though at a loss what to say. Finally, he informed me that Madame Pierson was ill and that she had sent word to me by him that she would not be able to see me that day.

"Is she ill? Why, I left her late yesterday afternoon and she was very well at that time!"

He bowed.

"But," I continued, "if she is ill, why send word to me by a third party? She does not live so far away that a useless call would harm me."

The same response from Mercanson. I could not understand what this peculiar manner signified, much less why she had entrusted her mission to him.

"Very well," I said, "I shall see her to-morrow and she will explain what this means."

His hesitation continued.

"Madame Pierson has also told me—that I should inform you—in fact, I am requested to——"

"Well, what is it?" I cried, impatiently.

"Sir, you are becoming violent, I think Madame Pierson is seriously ill; she will not be able to see you this week."

Another bow, and he retired.

It was clear that his visit concealed some mystery: either Madame Pierson did not wish to see me, and I could not explain why, or Mercanson had interfered on his own responsibility.

I waited until the following day and then presented myself at her door; the servant who met me said that her mistress was indeed very ill and could not see me; she refused to accept the money I offered her, and would not answer my questions.

As I was passing through the village on my return, I saw Mercanson; he was surrounded by a number of school children, his uncle's pupils. I stopped him in the midst of his harangue and asked if I could have a word with him.

He followed me aside; but now it was my turn to hesitate, for I was at a loss how to proceed to draw his secret from him.

" Sir," I finally said, " will you kindly inform me if what you told me yesterday was the truth, or was there some motive behind it? Moreover, as there is not a physician in the neighborhood who can be called, in case of necessity, it is important that I should know whether her condition is serious."

He protested that Madame Pierson was ill, but that he knew nothing more, except that she had sent for him and asked him to notify me as he had done. While talking, we had walked down the road some distance and had now reached a deserted spot. Seeing that neither strategy nor entreaty would serve my purpose, I suddenly turned and seized him by the arms.

"What does this mean, sir? You intend to resort to violence?" he cried.

"No, but I intend to make you tell me what you know."

"Sir, I am afraid of no one, and I have told you what you ought to know."

"You have told me what you think I ought to know, but not what you know. Madame Pierson is not sick, I am sure of it."

"How do you know?"

"The servant told me so. Why has she closed her door against me, and why did she send you to tell me of it?"

Mercanson saw a peasant passing.

"Pierre!" he cried, calling him by name, "wait a moment, I wish to speak with you."

The peasant approached; that was all he wanted, thinking I would not dare use violence in the presence of a third party. I let go of him, but so roughly that he staggered back and fell against a tree. He clenched his fist and turned away without a word.

For three weeks I suffered terribly. Three times a day I called at Madame Pierson's and was each time refused admittance. I received one letter from her; she said that my assiduity was causing talk in the village and begged me to call less frequently. Not a word about Mercanson or her illness.

This precaution on her part was so unnatural

and contrasted so strongly with her former proud indifference in matters of this kind, that at first I could hardly believe it. Not knowing what else to say, I replied that there was no desire in my heart but obedience to her wishes. But in spite of me, the words I used did not conceal the bitterness I felt.

I purposely delayed going to see her even when permitted to do so, and no longer sent to inquire about her condition, as I wished to have her know that I did not believe in her illness. I did not know why she kept me at a distance; but I was so miserably unhappy that, at times, I thought seriously of putting an end to a life that had become insupportable. I was accustomed to spend entire days in the woods, and one day I happened to encounter her there.

I hardly had the courage to ask for an explanation; she did not reply frankly and I did not recur to the subject, I could only count the days I was obliged to pass without seeing her, and live in the hope of a visit. All the time I was strongly tempted to throw myself at her feet, and tell her of my despair. I knew that she would not be insensible to it, and that she would at least express her pity; but her severity and the abrupt manner of her departure recalled me to my senses; I trembled lest I should lose her, and I would rather die than expose myself to that danger.

Thus, denied the solace of confession of my sorrow, my health began to give way. My feet lagged on the way to her house; I felt that I was exhausting the source of tears, and each visit cost me added sorrow; I was torn with the thought that I ought not to see her.

On her part there was neither the same tone nor the same ease as of old; she spoke of going away on a tour; she pretended to confess to me her longing to get away, leaving me more dead than alive after her cruel words. If surprised by a natural impulse of sympathy, she immediately checked herself and relapsed into her accustomed coldness. Upon one occasion, I could not restrain my tears; I saw her turn pale. As I was going, she said to me at the door:

" To-morrow, I am going to St. Luce, a neighboring village, and it is too far to go on foot. Be here with your horse early in the morning, if you have nothing to do, and go with me."

I was on hand promptly, as may readily be imagined. I had slept over that word with transports of joy; but, upon leaving my house, I experienced a feeling of deep dejection. In restoring me to the privilege I had formerly enjoyed of accompanying her on her missions about the country, she had clearly been guilty of a cruel caprice if she did not love me. She knew how I was suffering; why abuse my courage unless she had changed her mind?

This reflection had a strange influence on me. When she mounted her horse my heart beat violently as I took her foot; I do not know whether it was desire or anger. "If she is touched," I said to myself, "why this reserve? If she is a coquette, why so much liberty?"

Such are men. At my first word she saw that a change had taken place in me. I did not speak to her but kept to the other side of the road. When we reached the valley she appeared at ease and only turned her head from time to time to see if I was following her; but when we came to the forest and our horses' hoofs resounded against the rocks that lined the road, I saw that she was trembling. She stopped as though to wait for me, as I was some distance in the rear; when I had overtaken her, she set out on a gallop. We soon reached the foot of the mountain and were compelled to slacken our pace. I then made my way to her side; our heads were bowed; the time had come, I took her hand.

"Brigitte," I said, "are you weary of my complaints? Since I have been reinstated in your favor, since I have been allowed to see you every day and every evening, I have asked myself if I have been importunate. During the last two months, while strength and hope have been failing me, have I said a word of that fatal love which is consuming me? Raise your head and answer me. Do you not see that I

suffer and that my nights are given to weeping? Have you not met in the forest an unfortunate wretch, sitting in solitary dejection with his hands pressed to his forehead? Have you not seen tears on these bushes? Look at me, look at these mountains; do you realize that I love you? They know it, they are my witnesses; these rocks and these trees know my secret. Why lead me before them? Am I not wretched enough? Do I fail in courage? Have I obeyed you? To what tests, what tortures am I subjected, and for what crime? If you do not love me, what are you doing here?"

"Let us return," she said, "let us retrace our steps."

I seized her horse's bridle.

"No," I replied, "for I have spoken. If we return, I lose you, I realize it; I know in advance what you will say. You have been pleased to try my patience, you have set my sorrow at defiance, perhaps that you might have the right to drive me from your presence; you have become tired of that sorrowful lover who suffered without complaint and who drank with resignation the bitter chalice of your disdain! You knew that, alone with you in the presence of these trees, in the midst of this solitude where my love had its birth, I could not be silent! You wish to be offended. Very well, madame, I lose you! I have wept and I have suffered, I have too

long nourished in my heart a pitiless love that devours me. You have been cruel!"

As she was about to leap from her saddle, I seized her in my arms and pressed my lips to hers. She turned pale, her eyes closed, her bridle slipped from her hand and she fell to the ground.

"God be praised!" I cried, "she loves me!" She had returned my kiss.

I leaped to the ground and hastened to her side. She was extended on the ground. I raised her, she opened her eyes, and shuddered with terror; she pushed my arm aside, and burst into tears.

I stood near the roadside; I looked at her as she leaned against a tree, as beautiful as the day, her long hair falling over her shoulders, her hands twitching and trembling, her cheeks suffused with color, brilliant with purple and with pearls.

"Do not come near me!" she cried, "not a step!"

"Oh! my love," I said, "fear nothing; if I have offended you, you know how to punish me. I was angry and I gave way to my grief; treat me as you choose, you may go away now, you may send me away! I know that you love me, Brigitte, and you are safer here than a king in his palace."

As I spoke these words, Madame Pierson fixed her humid eyes on mine; I saw the happiness of

my life come to me in the flash of those orbs. I crossed the road and knelt before her. How little he loves, who can recall the words he uses when he confesses that love!

CHAPTER IX

If I were a jeweler, and had in my stock a pearl necklace that I wished to give a friend, it seems to me I would take great pleasure in placing it about her neck with my own hands; but if I were that friend, I would rather die than snatch the necklace from the jeweler's hand. I have seen many men hasten to give themselves to the woman they love, but I have always done the contrary, not through calculation, but through natural instinct. The woman who loves a little and resists does not love enough, and she who loves enough and resists knows that she is not sincerely loved.

Madame Pierson gave evidence of more confidence in me, confessing that she loved me when she had never shown it in her actions. The respect I felt for her inspired me with such joy that her face looked to me like a blossomed flower. At times, she would abandon herself to an impulse of sudden gaiety and then suddenly check herself, treating me like a child, and then looking at me with eyes filled with tears; in-

dulging in a thousand pleasantries, as a pretext for a more familiar word or caress, then quitting me to go aside and abandon herself to reverie. Is there a more beautiful sight? When she returned she would find me waiting for her in some spot where I had remained watching her.

"Oh! my friend!" I said. "Heaven itself rejoices to see how you are loved."

Yet I could neither conceal the violence of my desires, nor the pain I endured struggling against them. One evening, I told her that I had just learned of the loss of an important case, which would involve a considerable change in my affairs.

"How is it," she asked, "that you make this announcement and smile at the same time?"

"There is a certain maxim of a Persian poet," I replied, "'He who is loved by a beautiful woman is sheltered from every blow.'"

Madame Pierson made no reply; all that evening she was even more cheerful than usual. When we played cards with her aunt and I lost, she was merciless in her scorn, saying that I knew nothing of the game, and betting against me with so much success that she won all I had in my purse. When the old lady retired, she stepped out on the balcony and I followed her in silence.

The night was beautiful; the moon was setting and the stars shone brightly in a field of

deep azure. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees; the air was warm and laden with the perfume of spring.

She was leaning on her elbow, her eyes in the heavens; I leaned over her and watched her as she dreamed. Then I raised my own eyes; a voluptuous melancholy seized us both. We breathed together, the warm perfume wafted to us from the garden; we followed, in its lingering course, the pale light of the moon which glinted through the chestnut-trees. I thought of a certain day when I had looked up at the broad expanse of heaven with despair; I trembled at the recollection of that hour; life was so rich now! I felt a hymn of praise rising up in my heart. I surrounded the form of my dear beloved with my arm; she gently turned her head; her eyes were bathed in tears. Her body yielded, as does the rose, her open lips fell on mine, and the universe was forgotten.

CHAPTER X

Eternal angel of happy nights, who will utter thy silence? A kiss! mysterious vintage that flows from the lips as from a stainless chalice! Intoxication of the senses! O voluptuous pleasure! Yes, like God, thou art immortal! Sublime exaltation of the creature, universal

communion of beings, thrice sacred pleasure, what have they sung who have celebrated thy praise? They have called thee transitory, O thou who dost create! And they have said that thy passing beams have illumined their fugitive life. Words that are as feeble as the dying breath! Words of a sensual brute who is astonished that he should live for an hour, and who mistakes the rays of the eternal lamp for the spark which is struck from the flint.

O love! thou principle of life! precious flame over which all nature, like a careful vestal, incessantly watches in the temple of God! Center of all, by whom all exists! The spirit of destruction would itself die, blowing at thy flame! I am not astonished that thy name should be blasphemed, for they do not know who thou art, they who think they have seen thy face because they have opened their eyes; and when thou findest thy true prophets, united on earth with a kiss, thou closest their eyes lest they look upon the face of perfect joy.

But your first delights, languishing smiles, first stammering utterance of love, you who can be seen, who are you? Are you less in God's sight than all the rest, beautiful cherubim who soar in the alcove, and who bring to this world man awakened from the dream divine! Ah! dear children of pleasure, how your mother loves you! It is you, curious prattlers, who behold the first

mysteries, touches, trembling yet chaste, glances that are already insatiable, who begin to trace on the heart, as a tentative sketch, the ineffaceable image of cherished beauty! O royalty! O conquest! It is you who make lovers. And thou, true diadem, thou, serenity of happiness! First glance bent on life, first return of happiness to the many little things of life which are seen only through the medium of joy, first steps made by nature in the direction of the well-beloved! Who will paint you? What human word will ever express thy slightest caress?

He who, in the freshness of his youth, has taken leave of an adored woman; he who has walked through the streets without hearing the voices of those who speak to him; he who has sat in a lonely spot, laughing and weeping without knowing why; he who has placed his hands to his face in order to breathe the perfume that still clings to them; he who has suddenly forgotten what he had been doing on earth; he who has spoken to the trees along the route and to the birds in their flight; finally, he who in the midst of men has acted the madman, and then has fallen on his knees and thanked God for it; he will die without complaint: he has known the joy of love.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

I MUST now recite what happened to my love, and the change that took place in me. What reason can I give for it? None, except as I repeat the story and as I say: " It is the truth."

For two days, neither more nor less, I was Madame Pierson's lover. One fine night, I set out and traversed the road that led to her house. I was feeling so well in body and soul, that I leaped for joy and extended my arms to heaven. I found her at the top of the stairway, leaning on the railing, a lighted candle beside her. She was waiting for me and when she saw me ran to meet me.

She showed me how she had changed her coiffure which had displeased me, and told me how she had passed the day arranging her hair to suit my taste; how she had taken down a villainous black picture frame that had offended my eye; how she had renewed the flowers; she recounted all she had done since she had known me, how she had seen me suffer and how she had suffered herself; how she had thought of

leaving the country, of fleeing from her love; how she had employed every precaution against me; how she had sought advice from her aunt, from Mercanson and from the curé; how she had vowed to herself that she would die rather than yield, and how all that had been dissipated by a single word of mine, a glance, an incident; and with every confession, a kiss. She said that whatever I saw in her room that pleased my taste, whatever bagatelle on her table attracted my attention, she would give me; that whatever she did in the future, in the morning, in the evening, at any hour, I should regulate as I pleased; that the judgments of the world did not concern her; that if she had appeared to care for them, it was only to send me away; but that she wished to be happy and close her ears; that she was thirty years of age and had not long to be loved by me. "And you will love me a long time? Are those fine words with which you have beguiled me, true?" And then, loving reproaches because I had been late in coming to her; that she had put on her slippers in order that I might see her foot but that she was no longer beautiful; that she could wish she were; that she was, at fifteen. She went here and there, silly with love, crimson with joy; and she did not know what to imagine, what to say or do, in order to give herself and all that she had.

I was lying on the sofa; I felt, at every word she spoke, a bad hour of my past life slipping away from me. I watched the star of love rising in my sky, and it seemed to me I was like a tree filled with sap that shakes off its dry leaves in order to attire itself in new foliage.

She sat down at the piano and told me she was going to play an air by Stradella. I love more than all else, sacred music, and that morceau which she sang for me a number of times, gave me great pleasure.

"Yes," she said when she had finished, "but you are very much mistaken, the air is mine, and I have made you believe it was Stradella's."

"It is yours?"

"Yes, and I told you it was by Stradella, in order to see what you would say of it. I never play my own music, when I happen to compose any; but I wanted to try it with you, and you see it has succeeded, since you were deceived."

What a monstrous machine is man! What could be more innocent? A bright child might have adopted that ruse to surprise his teacher. She laughed heartily the while, but I felt a strange coldness as though a cloud had settled on me; my countenance changed.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Are you ill?"

"It is nothing; play that air again."

While she was playing, I walked up and down

the room; I passed my hand over my forehead as though to brush away the fog, I stamped my foot, shrugged my shoulders at my own madness; finally, I sat down on a cushion which had fallen to the floor; she came to me. The more I struggled with the spirit of darkness which had seized me, the thicker the night that gathered around my head.

"Verily," I said, "you lie so well? What! that air is yours? Is it possible you can lie so fluently?"

She looked at me with an air of astonishment.

"What is it?" she asked.

Unspeakable anxiety was depicted on her face. Surely she could not believe me fool enough to reproach her for such a harmless bit of pleasantry; she did not see anything serious in that sadness which I felt; but the more trifling the cause, the greater the surprise. At first she thought I, too, must be joking; but when she saw me growing paler every moment, as though about to faint, she stood with open lips and bent body, looking like a statue.

"God of Heaven!" she cried, "is it possible?"

You smile, perhaps, reader, at this page; I, who write it, still shudder as I think of it. Misfortunes have their symptoms as well as diseases, and there is nothing so terrible at sea as a little black point on the horizon.

However, my dear Brigitte drew a little round

table into the center of the room and brought out some supper. She had prepared it herself and I did not drink a drop that was not first borne to her lips. The blue light of day, piercing through the curtains, illumined her charming face and tender eyes; she was tired and allowed her head to fall on my shoulder with a thousand terms of endearment.

I could not struggle against such charming abandon, and my heart expanded with joy; I believed I had rid myself of the bad dream that had just tormented me, and I begged her pardon for giving way to a sudden impulse which I, myself, did not understand.

"My friend," I said from the bottom of my heart, "I am very sorry that I unjustly reproached you for a piece of innocent badinage; but if you love me, never lie to me, even in the smallest matter, for a lie is an abomination to me and I can not endure it."

I told her I would remain until she was asleep. I saw her close her beautiful eyes, and heard her murmur something in her sleep as I bent over and kissed her adieu. Then I went away with a tranquil heart, promising myself that I would henceforth enjoy my happiness and allow nothing to disturb it.

But the next day Brigitte said to me, as though by chance:

"I have a large book in which I have written

my thoughts, everything that has occurred to my mind, and I want you to see what I said of you the first day I met you."

We read together what concerned me, to which we added a hundred foolish comments, after which I began to turn the leaves in a mechanical way. A phrase, written in capital letters caught my eye on one of the pages I was turning; I distinctly saw some words that were insignificant enough and I was about to read the rest when Brigitte stopped me and said:

"Do not read that."

I threw the book on the table.

"Why, certainly not," I said, "I did not think what I was doing."

"Do you still take things seriously?" she asked, smiling, doubtless seeing my malady coming on again; "take the book, I want you to read it."

The book lay on the table within easy reach, and I did not take my eyes from it. I seemed to hear a voice whispering in my ear, and I thought I saw, grimacing before me, with his glacial smile, and dry face, Desgenais. "What are you doing here, Desgenais?" I asked, as if I really saw him. He looked as he did that evening, when he leaned over my table and unfolded to me his catechism of vice.

I kept my eyes on the book and I felt vaguely stirring in my memory some forgotten words of

the past. The spirit of doubt hanging over my head had injected into my veins a drop of poison; the vapor mounted to my head and I staggered like a drunken man. What secret was Brigitte concealing from me? I knew very well that I had only to bend over and open the book; but at what place? How could I recognize the leaf on which my eye had chanced to fall?

My pride, moreover, would not permit me to take the book; was it indeed pride? "O God!" I said to myself with a frightful sense of sadness, "is the past a specter? and can it come out of its tomb? Ah! wretch that I am, can I never love?"

All my ideas of contempt for women, all the phrases of mocking fatuity which I had repeated as a schoolboy his lesson, suddenly came to my mind; and strange to say, while formerly I did not believe in making a parade of them, now it seemed that they were real or at least that they had been.

I had known Madame Pierson four months, but I knew nothing of her past life and had never questioned her about it. I had yielded to my love for her with confidence and without reservation. I found a sort of pleasure in taking her just as she was, for just what she seemed, while suspicion and jealousy are so foreign to my nature that I was more surprised at feeling them toward Brigitte than she was in discover-

ing them in me. Never, in my first love, nor in the affairs of daily life have I been distrustful, but on the contrary, bold and frank, suspecting nothing. I had to see my mistress betray me before my eyes before I would believe that she could deceive me. Desgenais himself, while preaching to me after his manner, joked me about the ease with which I could be duped. The story of my life was an incontestable proof that I was credulous rather than suspicious; and when the words in that book suddenly struck me, it seemed to me I felt a new being within me, a sort of unknown self; my reason revolted against the feeling, and I did not dare ask whither all that was leading me.

But the suffering I had endured, the memory of the perfidy that I had witnessed, the frightful cure I had imposed on myself, the opinions of my friends, the corrupt life I had led, the sad truths I had learned, all those that I had unconsciously surmised during my sad experience, finally, debauchery, contempt of love, abuse of everything, that is what I had in my heart although I did not suspect it; and at the moment when life and hope were again being born within me, all these furies that were growing numb with time, seized me by the throat and cried out that they were there.

I bent over and opened the book, then immediately closed it and threw it on the table.

Brigitte was looking at me; in her beautiful eyes there was neither wounded pride nor anger; there was nothing but tender solicitude as if I were ill.

"Do you think I have secrets?" she asked, embracing me.

"No," I replied, "I know nothing except that you are beautiful and that I would die, loving you."

When I returned home to dinner I said to Larive:

"Who is that Madame Pierson?"

He looked at me in astonishment.

"You have lived here many years," I continued; "you ought to know better than I. What do they say of her here? What do they think of her in the village? What kind of a life did she lead before I knew her? Whom did she receive as her friends?"

"In faith, sir, I have never seen her do otherwise than she does every day, that is to say, walk in the valley, play piquet with her aunt, and visit the poor. The peasants call her Brigitte la Rose; I have never heard a word against her except that she goes through the woods alone at all hours of the day and night; but that is when engaged in charitable work. She is the ministering angel in the valley. As for those she receives, there are only the curé and M. de Dalens, during vacation."

"Who is this M. de Dalens?"

"He owns the château at the foot of the mountain on the other side; he only comes here for the chase."

"Is he young?"

"Yes."

"Is he related to Madame Pierson?"

"No, he was a friend of her husband."

"Has her husband been dead long?"

"Five years on All-Saints' day. He was a worthy man."

"And has this M. de Dalens paid court?"

"To the widow? In faith—to tell the truth—" he stopped, embarrassed.

"Well, will you answer me?"

"Some say so and some do not—I know nothing and have seen nothing."

"And you just told me that they do not talk about her in the country?"

"That is all they have said, and I supposed you knew that."

"In a word, yes or no?"

"Yes, sir, I think so, at least."

I arose from the table and walked down the road; Mercanson was there. I expected he would try to avoid me; on the contrary he approached me.

"Sir," he said, "you exhibited signs of anger which it does not become a man of my character to resent. I wish to express my regret that

I was charged to communicate a message which appeared so unwelcome."

I returned his compliment, supposing he would leave me at once; but he walked along at my side.

"Dalens! Dalens!" I repeated, between my teeth, "who will tell me about Dalens?" For Larive had told me nothing except what a valet might learn. From whom had he learned it? From some servant or peasant. I must have some witness who had seen Dalens with Madame Pierson and who knew all about their relations. I could not get that Dalens out of my head, and not being able to talk to any one else, I asked Mercanson about him.

If Mercanson was not a bad man, he was either a fool or very shrewd, I have never known which; it is certain that he had reason to hate me and that he treated me as meanly as possible. Madame Pierson, who had the greatest friendship for the curé, had almost come to think equally well of the nephew. He was proud of it, and consequently jealous. It is not love alone that inspires jealousy; a favor, a kind word, a smile from a beautiful mouth, may arouse some people to jealous rage.

Mercanson appeared to be astonished. I was somewhat astonished myself; but who knows his own mind?

At his first words, I saw that the priest un-

derstood what I wanted to know and had decided not to satisfy me.

"How does it happen that you have known Madame Pierson so long and so intimately, I think so, at least, and have not met M. de Dalens? But, doubtless, you have some reason unknown to me for inquiring about him to-day. All I can say is that, as far as I know, he is an honest man, kind and charitable; he was, like you, very intimate with Madame Pierson; he is fond of hunting and entertains handsomely. He and Madame Pierson were accustomed to devote much of their time to music. He punctually attended to his works of charity and, when in the country, accompanied that lady on her visits, just as you do. His family enjoys an excellent reputation at Paris; I used to find him with Madame Pierson whenever I called; his manners were excellent. As for the rest, I speak truly and frankly, as becomes me when it concerns persons of his merit. I believe that he only comes here for the chase; he was a friend of her husband; he is said to be rich and very generous; but I know nothing about it except that——"

With what tortured phrases was this dull tormentor teasing me. I was ashamed to listen to him, yet dared not to ask a single question or interrupt his vile insinuations. I was alone on the promenade; the poisoned arrow of suspicion had entered my heart. I did not know whether I

felt more of anger or of sorrow. The confidence with which I had abandoned myself to my love for Brigitte, had been so sweet and so natural that I could not bring myself to believe that so much happiness had been built upon an illusion. That sentiment of credulity, which had attracted me to her, seemed a proof that she was worthy. Was it possible that these four months of happiness were but a dream?

But, after all, I thought that woman has yielded too easily. Was there not deception in that pretended anxiety to have me leave the country? Is she not just like all the rest? Yes, that is the way they all do; they attempt to escape in order to know the happiness of being pursued: it is the feminine instinct. Was it not she who confessed her love by her own act, at the very moment I had decided that she would never be mine? Did she not accept my arm, the first day I met her? If that Dalens has been her lover, he probably is still; there are certain liaisons that have neither beginning nor end; when chance ordains a meeting, it is resumed; when parted, it is forgotten. If that man comes here this summer, she will probably see him without breaking with me. Who is that aunt, what mysterious life is this that has charity for its cloak, this liberty that cares nothing for opinion? May they not be adventurers, these two women with their little house, their prudence and their

caution which enables them to impose on people so easily? Assuredly, for all I know, I have fallen into an affair of gallantry when I thought I was engaged in a romance. But what can I do? There is no one here who can help me except the priest, who does not care to tell me what he knows, and his uncle who will say still less. Who will save me? How can I learn the truth?

Thus spoke jealousy; thus, forgetting so many tears and all that I had suffered, I had come, at the end of two days, to a point where I was tormenting myself with the idea that Brigitte had yielded too easily. Thus, like all who doubt, I brushed aside sentiment and reason to dispute with facts, to attach myself to the letter and dissect my love.

While absorbed in these reflections, I was slowly approaching Madame Pierson's.

I found the gate open, and as I entered the garden, I saw a light in the kitchen. I thought of questioning the servant, I stepped to the window.

A feeling of horror rooted me to the spot. The servant was an old woman, thin and wrinkled and habitually bent over, a common deformity in people who have worked in the fields. I found her shaking a cooking utensil over a filthy sink. A dirty candle fluttered in her trembling hand; about her were pots, kettles and

dishes, the remains of dinner that a dog sniffed at, from time to time, as though ashamed; a warm, nauseating odor emanated from the reeking walls. When the old woman caught sight of me, she smiled in a confidential way; she had seen me take leave of her mistress.

I shuddered as I thought what I had come to seek in a spot so well suited to my ignoble purpose. I fled from that old woman as from jealousy personified, and as though the stench of her dishes had come from my heart.

Brigitte was at the window watering her well-beloved flowers; a child of one of her neighbors was lying in a cradle at her side and she was gently rocking it with her disengaged hand; the child's mouth was full of bonbons, and in gurgling eloquence it was addressing an incomprehensible apostrophe to its nurse. I sat down near her and kissed the child on its fat cheeks, as though to imbibe some of its innocence. Brigitte accorded me a timid greeting; she could see her troubled image in my eyes. For my part, I avoided her glance; the more I admired her beauty and her air of candor, the more I was convinced that such a woman was either an angel or a monster of perfidy; I forced myself to recall each one of Mercanson's words, and I confronted, so to speak, the man's insinuations with her presence and her face. "She is very beautiful," I said to myself, "and very danger-

ous if she knows how to deceive; but I will fathom her and I will sound her heart; and she shall know who I am."

"My dear," I said after a long silence, "I have just given a piece of advice to a friend who consulted me. He is an honest young man, and he writes me that a woman he loves has another lover. He asks me what he ought to do."

"What reply did you make?"

"Two questions: Is she pretty? Do you love her? If you love her, forget her; if she is pretty and you do not love her, keep her for your pleasure; there will always be time to leave her, if it is merely a matter of beauty, and one is worth as much as another."

Hearing me speak thus, Brigitte put down the child she was holding; she sat down at the other end of the room. There was no light in the room; the moon, which was shining on the spot where she had been standing, threw a shadow over the sofa on which she was now seated. The words I had uttered were so heartless, so cruel, that I was dazed, myself, and my heart was filled with bitterness. The child in its cradle began to cry. Then all three of us were silent while a cloud passed over the moon.

A servant entered the room with a light and carried the child away. I arose, Brigitte also; but she suddenly placed her hand on her heart and fell to the floor.

I hastened to her side; she had not lost consciousness and begged me not to call any one. She explained that she was subject to violent palpitation of the heart and had been troubled by fainting spells from her youth; that there was no danger and no remedy. I kneeled beside her; she sweetly opened her arms; I raised her head and placed it on my shoulder.

"Ah! my friend," she said, "I pity you."

"Listen to me," I whispered in her ear, "I am a wretched fool, but I can keep nothing on my heart. Who is this M. de Dalens who lives on the mountain and comes to see you?"

She appeared astonished to hear me mention that name.

"Dalens?" she replied. "He was my husband's friend."

She looked at me as though to say: "Why do you ask?" It seemed to me that her face wore a grieved expression. I bit my lips. "If she wants to deceive me," I thought, "I was foolish to question her."

Brigitte arose with difficulty; she took her fan and began to walk up and down the room.

She was breathing hard; I had wounded her. She was absorbed in thought and we exchanged two or three glances that were almost cold. She stepped to her desk, opened it, drew out a package of letters tied together with a ribbon, and threw it at my feet without a word.

But I was looking neither at her nor her letters; I had just thrown a stone into the abyss and was listening for the echoes. For the first time, offended pride was depicted on Brigitte's face. There was no longer either anxiety or pity in her eyes and, just as I had come to feel myself other than I had ever been, so I saw in her a woman I did not know.

"Read that," she said finally. I stepped up to her and took her hand.

"Read that, read that!" she repeated in freezing tones.

I took the letters. At that moment I felt so persuaded of her innocence that I was seized with remorse.

"You remind me," she said, "that I owe you the story of my life; sit down and you shall learn it. You will open these drawers and you will read all that I have written and all that has been written to me."

She sat down and motioned me to a chair. I saw that she found it difficult to speak. She was pale as death, her voice constrained, her throat swollen.

"Brigitte! Brigitte!" I cried, "in the name of Heaven, do not speak! God is my witness I was not born such as you see me; during my life I have been neither suspicious nor distrustful, I have been undone, my heart has been seared by the treachery of others. A frightful

experience has led me to the very brink of the precipice, and for a year I have seen nothing but evil here below. God is my witness that up to this day I did not believe myself capable of playing the ignoble rôle I have assumed, the meanest rôle of all, that of a jealous lover. God is my witness that I love you and that you are the only one in the world who can cure me of the past. I have had to do, up to this time, with women who deceived me, or who were unworthy of love. I have led the life of a libertine; I bear on my heart certain marks that will never be effaced. Is it my fault if calumny, if base suggestion, to-day planted in a heart whose fibers were still trembling with pain and prompt to assimilate all that resembles sorrow, has driven me to despair? I have just heard the name of a man I have never met, of whose existence I was ignorant; I have been given to understand that there has been between you and him a certain intimacy, which proves nothing; I do not intend to question you; I have suffered from it, I have confessed to you and I have done you an irreparable wrong. But rather than consent to what you propose, I will throw it all in the fire. Ah! my friend, do not degrade me; do not attempt to justify yourself, do not punish me for suffering. How could I, in the bottom of my heart, suspect you of deceiving me? No, you are beautiful and you are true; a single

glance of yours, Brigitte, tells me more than words could utter, and I am content. If you knew what horrors, what monstrous deceit, the child who stands before you has seen! If you knew how he had been treated, how they have mocked at all that is good, how they have taken pains to teach him all that leads to doubt, to jealousy, to despair! Alas! alas! my dear mistress, if you knew whom you love! Do not reproach me but rather pity me; I must forget that other beings than you exist. Who can know through what frightful trials, through what pitiless suffering I have passed! I did not expect this, I did not anticipate this moment. Since you have become mine, I realize what I have done; I have felt, in kissing you, that my lips were not, like yours, unsullied. In the name of Heaven, help me live! God made me a better man than the one you see before you."

Brigitte held out her hands and caressed me tenderly. She begged me to tell her all that had led to this sad scene. I spoke of what I had learned from Larive but did not dare confess that I had interviewed Mercanson. She insisted that I listen to her explanation. M. de Dalens had loved her; but he was a man of frivolous disposition, dissipated and inconstant, she had given him to understand that, not wishing to remarry, she could only request that he drop the rôle of suitor, and he had yielded to

her wishes with good grace; but his visits had become more rare since that time, until now they had ceased altogether. She drew from the bundle a certain letter which she showed me, the date of which was recent; I could not help blushing as I found in it the confirmation of all she had said; she assured me that she pardoned me, and exacted a promise that in the future I would promptly tell her of any cause I might have to suspect her. Our treaty was sealed with a kiss, and when I left her we had both forgotten that M. de Dalens ever existed.

CHAPTER II

A KIND of stagnant inertia, tempered with bitter joy, is characteristic of debauchery. It is the sequence of a life of caprice, where nothing is regulated according to the needs of the body, but everything according to the fantasy of the mind and one must be always ready to obey the behests of the other. Youth and will can resist excess; but nature silently avenges herself, and the day when she decides to repair her forces, the will struggles to retard her work and abuses her anew.

Finding about him, then, all the objects that were able to tempt him the evening before, the

man who is incapable of enjoying them, looks down at them with a smile of disgust. At the same time, the objects which excite his desire are never attained with sangfroid; all that the debauchee loves, he takes violent possession of; his life is a fever; his organs, in order to search the depths of joy, are forced to avail themselves of the stimulant of fermented liquors, and sleepless nights; in the days of ennui and of idleness, he feels more keenly than other men the disparity between his impotence and his temptations, and, in order to resist the latter, pride must come to his aid and make him believe that he disdains them. It is thus he spits on all the feasts and pleasures of his life, and that between an ardent thirst and a profound satiety a feeling of tranquil vanity leads him to his death.

Although I was no longer a debauchee it came to pass that my body suddenly remembered that it had been. It is easy to understand why I had not felt the effects of it sooner. While mourning my father's death, every other thought was crowded from my mind. Then a passionate love succeeded; while I was alone, ennui had nothing to struggle for. Sad or gay, fair or foul, what matters it to him who is alone?

As zinc, that demi-metal, drawn from the blue vein where it lies sleeping, attracts to itself a ray of light when placed near a piece of green leather, thus Brigitte's kisses gradually awak-

ened in my heart what had been buried there. At her side I perceived what I really was.

There were days when I felt such a strange sensation in the mornings, that it is impossible for me to define it. I awakened without a motive, feeling like a man who has spent the night in eating and drinking to the point of exhaustion. All external sensations caused me insupportable fatigue, all well-known objects of daily life repelled and annoyed me; if I spoke, it was in ridicule of what others thought or of what I thought myself. Then, extended on the bed, as though incapable of motion, I dismissed all thought of undertaking whatever had been agreed upon the evening before; I recalled all the tender and loving things I had said to my mistress during my better moments, and was not satisfied until I had spoiled and poisoned those memories of happy days. "Can you not forget all that?" Brigitte would sadly inquire, "if there are two different men in you, do you not, when the bad rouses himself, forget to humor the good?"

The patience with which Brigitte opposed those vagaries only served to excite my sinister gaiety. Strange that man who suffers wishes to make her, whom he loves, suffer! To lose control of oneself, is that not the worst of evils? Is there anything more cruel for a woman than to hear a man turn to derision all there is that

is sacred and mysterious? Yet she did not flee from me; she remained at my side while in my savage humor, I insulted love and allowed insane ravings to escape from lips that were still moist with her kisses.

On such days, contrary to my usual inclination, I liked to talk of Paris and speak of my life of debauchery as the most commendable thing in the world. "You are nothing but a saint," I would laughingly observe; "you do not understand what I say. There is nothing like those careless ones who make love without believing in it." Was that not the same as saying that I did not believe in it?

"Very well," Brigitte replied, "teach me how to please you always. I am perhaps as pretty as those mistresses whom you mourn; if I have not their skill to divert you, I beg that you will instruct me. Act as though you did not love me and let me love you without saying anything about it. If I am devoted to religion, I am also devoted to love. What can I do to make you believe it?"

Then she would stand before the mirror arraying herself as though for a ball, affecting a coquetry that she was far from feeling, trying to adopt my tone, laughing and skipping about the room. "Am I to your taste?" she would ask. "Which one of your mistresses do I resemble? Am I beautiful enough to make you

forget that any one can believe in love? Have I a sufficiently careless air to suit you?" Then in the midst of that factitious joy, she would turn her back and I could see her shudder until the flowers she had placed in her hair trembled. I threw myself at her feet.

"Stop!" I cried, "you resemble only too closely, that which you try to imitate, that which my mouth has been so vile as to conjure up before you. Lay aside those flowers and that dress. Let us wash away such mimicry with a sincere tear; do not remind me that I am but a prodigal son; I remember the past too well."

But even this repentance was cruel as it proved to her that the fantoms in my heart were full of reality. In yielding to an impulse of horror, I merely gave her to understand that her resignation and her desire to please me only served to call up an impure image.

And it was true; I reached her side transported with joy, swearing that I would regret my past life; on my knees, I protested my respect for her; then a gesture, a word, a trick of turning as she approached me, recalled to my mind the fact that such and such a woman had made that gesture, had used that word, had that same trick of turning.

Poor devoted soul! What didst thou suffer in seeing me turn pale before thee, in seeing my arms fall as though lifeless at my side!

When the kiss died on my lips, and the full glance of love, that pure ray of God's light, fled from my eyes like an arrow turned by the wind! Ah! Brigitte! what diamonds trickled from thine eyes! What treasures of charity didst thou exhaust with patient hand! How pitiful thy love!

For a long time, good and bad days succeeded each other almost regularly; I showed myself alternately cruel and scornful, tender and devoted, insensible and haughty, repentant and submissive. The face of Desgenais which had at first appeared to me, as though to warn me whither I was drifting, was now constantly before me. On my days of doubt and coldness, I conversed, so to speak, with him, often when I had offended Brigitte by some cruel mockery I said to myself: "If he were in my place he would do as I do!"

And then, at other times, when putting on my hat to go to see Brigitte, I would look in my glass and say: "What is there so terrible about it, anyway? I have, after all, a pretty mistress; she has given herself to a libertine, let her take me for what I am." I reached her side with a smile on my lips, I sank into a chair with an air of deliberate insolence; then I saw Brigitte approach, her large eyes filled with tenderness and anxiety; I seized her little hands in mine and lost myself in an infinite dream.

How name a thing that is nameless? Was I good or bad? Was I distrustful or a fool? It is useless to reflect on it; it happened thus.

One of our neighbors was a young woman by the name of Madame Daniel, she possessed some beauty, and still more coquetry; she was poor but tried to pass for rich; she would come to see us after dinner and always played a heavy game against us, although her losses embarrassed her; she sang but had no voice. In the solitude of that unknown village, where an unkind fate had buried her, she was consumed with an uncontrollable passion for pleasure. She talked of nothing but Paris, where she visited two or three times a year; she pretended to keep up with the fashions; my dear Brigitte assisted her as best she could, while smiling with pity. Her husband was employed by the government; he, once a year, would take her to the house of the chief of his department where, attired in her best, the little woman danced to her heart's content. She would return with shining eyes and tired body; she would come to us to tell of her prowess, and her success in assaulting the masculine heart. The rest of the time she read novels, never taking the trouble to look after her household affairs, which were not always in the best condition.

Every time I saw her I laughed at her, finding nothing so ridiculous as the high life she thought she was leading; I would interrupt her

description of a ball to inquire about her husband and her father-in-law, both of whom she detested, the one because he was her husband, and the other because he was only a peasant; in short, we were always disputing on some subject.

In my evil moments, I thought of paying court to that woman just for the sake of annoying Brigitte.

"You see," I said, "how perfectly Madame Daniel understands life! In her present sprightly humor could one desire a more charming mistress?"

I then paid her the most extravagant compliments; her senseless chatting I described as unrestraint tempered by finesse, her pretentious exaggerations as a natural desire to please; was it her fault that she was poor? At least, she thought of nothing but pleasure and confessed it freely; she did not preach sermons herself, nor did she listen to them from others; I went so far as to tell Brigitte that she ought to adopt her as a model, and that she was just the kind of woman to please me.

Poor Madame Daniel discovered signs of melancholy in Brigitte's eyes. She was a strange creature, as good and sincere, when you could get finery out of her head, as she was stupid when absorbed in such frivolous affairs. On occasions, she could be both good and stupid. One

fine day when they were walking together, she threw herself into Brigitte's arms and told her that she had noticed that I was beginning to pay court to her, and that I had made certain proposals to her, the meaning of which was not doubtful; but she knew that I was another's lover, and as for her, whatever might happen, she would die rather than destroy the happiness of a friend. Brigitte thanked her, and Madame Daniel, having set her conscience at ease, considered it no sin to render me desolate by languishing glances.

In the evening when she had gone, Brigitte, in a severe tone, told me what had happened; she begged me to spare her such affronts in the future.

"Not that I attach any importance to such pleasantries," she said, "but if you have any love for me, it seems to me it is useless to inform a third party that there are times when you have not."

"Is it possible," I replied with a smile, "that it is important? You see very well, that I was only joking, and that I do it only to pass away the time."

"Ah! my friend, my friend," said Brigitte, "it is too bad that you must seek pastimes."

Some days later, I proposed that we go to the prefecture to see Madame Daniel dance; she unwillingly consented. While she was arranging

her toilet, I sat near the window and reproached her for losing her former cheerfulness.

"What is the matter with you?" I asked; I knew as well as she. "Why that morose air that never leaves you? In truth, you make our life quite sad. I have known you when you were more joyous, more free and more open; I am not flattered by the thought that I am responsible for the change. But you have a cloistral disposition; you were born to live in a convent."

It was Sunday; as we were driving down the road, Brigitte ordered the carriage to stop in order to say good evening to some friends, fresh and vigorous country girls, who were going to dance at Tilleuls. When they had gone on Brigitte followed them with longing eyes; her little rustic dance was very dear to her; she dried her eyes with her handkerchief.

We found Madame Daniel at the prefecture in high feather. I danced with her so often that it excited comment, I paid her a thousand compliments and she replied as best she could.

Brigitte was near us, and her eyes never left us. I can hardly describe what I felt; it was both pleasure and pain. I clearly saw that she was jealous; but instead of being moved by it, I did all I could to increase her suffering.

On the return, I expected to hear her reproaches; she made none, but remained silent for

three days. When I came to see her, she would greet me kindly; then we would sit down facing each other, both of us preoccupied, scarcely exchanging a word. The third day she spoke, overwhelmed me with bitter reproaches, told me that my conduct was unreasonable, that she could not account for it except on the supposition that I had ceased to love her; but she could not endure this life and would resort to anything rather than submit to my caprices and coldness. Her eyes were full of tears, and I was about to ask her pardon when some words escaped her that were so bitter that my pride revolted. I replied in the same tone, and our quarrel became violent. I told her that it was absurd to suppose that I could not inspire enough confidence in my mistress to escape the necessity of explaining my every action; that Madame Daniel was only a pretext; that she very well knew that I did not think of that woman seriously; that her pretended jealousy was nothing but the expression of her desire for despotic power, and that, moreover, if she had tired of this life, it was easy enough to put an end to it.

"Very well," she replied; "it is true that I do not recognize you as the same man I first knew; you doubtless performed a little comedy to persuade me that you loved me; you are tired of your rôle and can think of nothing but abuse. You suspect me of deceiving you upon the first

word, and I am under no obligation to submit to your insults. You are no longer the man I loved."

"I know what your sufferings are," I replied. "I can not make a step without exciting your alarm. Soon I will not be permitted to address a word to any one but you. You pretend that you have been abused in order that you may be justified in offering insult; you accuse me of tyranny in order that I may become your slave. Since I trouble your repose, I leave you in peace; you will never see me again."

We parted in anger, and I passed an entire day without seeing her. The next night, toward midnight, I was seized by a feeling of melancholy that I could not resist. I shed a torrent of tears; I overwhelmed myself with reproaches that I richly deserved. I told myself that I was nothing but a fool, and a cowardly fool at that, to make the noblest, the best of creatures, suffer in this way. I ran to her to throw myself at her feet.

Entering the garden, I saw that her room was lighted and a flash of suspicion crossed my mind. "She does not expect me at this hour," I said to myself; "who knows what she may be doing. I left her in tears yesterday; I may find her ready to sing to-day and caring no more for me than if I never existed. I must enter gently in order to surprise her."

I advanced on tiptoe, and the door being open, I could see Brigitte without being seen.

She was seated at her table and was writing in that same book that had aroused my suspicions. She held in her left hand, a little box of white wood which she looked at from time to time and trembled. There was something sinister in the quiet that reigned in the room. Her secretary was open and several bundles of papers were carefully ranged in order.

I made some noise at the door. She rose, went to the secretary, closed it, then came to me with a smile:

"Octave," she said, "we are two children. If you had not come here, I would have gone to you. Pardon me, I was wrong. Madame Daniel comes to dinner to-morrow; make me repent, if you choose, of what you call my despotism. If you but love me I am happy; let us forget what is past and let us not spoil our happiness."

CHAPTER III

Our quarrel had been less sad than our reconciliation; it was attended, on Brigitte's part, by a mystery which frightened me at first and then planted in my soul the seeds of constant dread.

There developed in me, in spite of my struggles, the two elements of misfortune which the

past had bequeathed me: at times, furious jealousy attended by reproaches and insults; at other times, a cruel gaiety, an affected cheerfulness that mockingly outraged whatever I held most dear. Thus, the inexorable specters of the past pursued me without respite; thus, Brigitte seeing herself treated alternately, as a faithless mistress and a shameless woman, fell into a condition of melancholy that clouded our entire life; and worst of all, that sadness even, the cause of which I knew, was not the most burdensome of our sorrows. I was young and I loved pleasure; that daily association with a woman older than I who suffered and languished, that face more and more serious, which was always before me, all that repelled my youth and aroused within me bitter regrets for the liberty I had lost.

When we were passing through the forest by the beautiful light of the moon, we both experienced a profound melancholy. Brigitte looked at me in pity. We sat down on a rock near a wild gorge; we passed two entire hours there; her half-veiled eyes plunged into my soul athwart the glance from mine, then wandered to nature, to the heavens and the valley.

"Ah! my dear child," she said, "how I pity you! You do not love me."

In order to reach that rock, one must travel two leagues; two more in returning makes four.

Brigitte was afraid of neither fatigue nor darkness. We set out at eleven at night, expecting to reach home some time in the morning. When we went on long tramps, she always dressed in a blue blouse and the apparel of a man, saying that skirts were not made for bushes. She walked before me in the sand with a firm step and such a charming mélange of feminine delicacy and childlike temerity, that I stopped every few moments to look at her. It seemed that, once started, she had to accomplish a difficult but sacred task; she walked in front like a soldier, her arms swinging, her voice ringing through the woods in song; suddenly she turned, came to me, and kissed me. This was going; on the return, she leaned on my arm; then more songs; there were confidences, tender avowals in low tones, although we were alone, two leagues from anywhere. I do not recall a single word spoken on the return that was not of love or friendship.

One night, we struck out through the woods, leaving the road which led to the rock. Brigitte was tramping along so stoutly, her little velvet cap on her light hair made her look so much like a resolute gamin, that I forgot that she was a woman when there were no obstacles in our path. More than once, she was obliged to call me to her aid when I, without thinking of her, had pushed on ahead. I can not describe the

effect produced on me in the clear night air, in the midst of the forest, by that voice of a woman, half-joyous and half-plaintive, coming from that little schoolboy body wedged in between roots and trunks of trees, unable to advance. I took her in my arms.

" Come, madame," I cried, laughing, " you are a pretty little mountaineer, but you are blistering your white hands and in spite of your hobnailed shoes, your stick and your martial air, I see that you must be carried."

We arrived at the rock breathless, about my body was strapped a leather belt to which was attached a wicker bottle. When we were seated on the rock, my dear Brigitte asked for the bottle; I had lost it, as well as a tinder-box which served another purpose: that was to read the inscriptions on the guide-posts when we went astray, which ocurred frequently. At such times, I would climb the posts and read the half-effaced inscription by the light of the tinder-box; all that playfully, like the children that we were. At a cross-road, we would have to examine not one guide-post, but five or six until the right one was found. But this time we had lost our baggage on the way.

" Very well," said Brigitte, " we will pass the night here as I am rather tired. This rock will make a hard bed but we can cover it with dry leaves. Let us sit down and make the best of it."

effect produced on me in the dusk of night air, in the midst of the forest, by the voice of a woman, half-joyous and half-plaintive, coming from that little schoolboy body wedged in between roots and trunks of trees, unable to advance. I took her in my arms.

"Come, madame," I cried, laughing, "you are a pretty little mountaineer, but you are tiring your white hands and in spite of your knee-cuffs and your stick and your martial air I see that you must be carried."

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We will pass the night here, as I am tired

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The night was superb; the moon was rising behind us; I looked at it over my left shoulder. Brigitte was watching the lines of the wooded hills as they began to design themselves against the background of sky. As the light flooded the copse and threw its halo over sleeping nature, Brigitte's song became more gentle and more melancholy. Then she bent over, and, throwing her arms around my neck, said:

"Do not think that I do not understand your heart or that I would reproach you for what you make me suffer. It is not your fault, my friend, if you have not the power to forget your past life; you have loved me in good faith and I shall never regret, although I should die for it, the day I gave myself to you. You thought you were entering upon a new life and that with me, you would forget the women who had deceived you. Alas! Octave, I used to smile at that precocious experience which you said you had been through, and of which I heard you boast like a child who knows nothing of life. I thought I had but to will it, and all that there was that was good in your heart would come to your lips with my first kiss. You, too, believed it, but we were both mistaken. O my child! You have, in your heart, a plague that can not be cured; that woman who deceived you, how you must have loved her! Yes, more than you love me, alas! much more, since with all my

poor love I can not efface her image; she must have deceived you most cruelly since it is in vain that I am faithful! And the others, those wretches who then poisoned your youth! The pleasures they sold must have been terrible since you ask me to imitate them! You remember them with me! Alas! my dear child, that is too cruel. I like you better when you are unjust and furious, when you reproach me for imaginary crimes and avenge on me the wrong done you by others, than when you are under the influence of that frightful gaiety, when you assume that air of hideous mockery, when that mask of scorn affronts my eyes. Tell me, Octave, why that? Why those moments when you speak of love with contempt and rail at the most sacred mysteries of love? What frightful power over your irritable nerves has that life you have led, that such insults mount to your lips in spite of you? Yes, in spite of you, for your heart is noble, you blush at your own blasphemy; you love me too much not to suffer when you see me suffer. Ah! I know you now. The first time I saw you thus, I was seized with a feeling of terror of which I can give you no idea. I thought you were only a roué, that you had deliberately deceived me by feigning a love you did not feel, and that I saw you such as you really were. O my friend! I thought it was time to die; what a night I passed! You

do not know my life; you do not know that I, who speak to you, have had an experience as terrible as yours. Alas! life is sweet only to those who do not know life.

" You are not, my dear Octave, the only man I have loved. There is hidden in my heart a fatal story that I wish you to know. My father destined me, when I was quite young, for the only son of an old friend. They were neighbors and each owned a little domain of almost equal value. The two families saw each other every day and lived, so to speak, together. My father died; my mother had been dead some time. I lived with an aunt whom you know. A journey she was compelled to take, forced her to confide me to the care of my future father-in-law. He called me his daughter and it was so well known about the country that I was to marry his son that we were allowed the greatest liberty together.

" That young man, whose name you need not know, appeared to love me. What had been friendship from infancy, became love in time. He began to tell me of the happiness that awaited us; he spoke of his impatience, I was only one year younger than he; but he had made the acquaintance of a man of dissipated habits who lived in the vicinity, a sort of adventurer, and had listened to his evil suggestions. While I was yielding to his caresses with the confidence of a

child, he resolved to deceive his father and to abandon me after having ruined me.

" His father called us into his room one evening and, in the presence of the family, set the day of our wedding. The very evening before that day, he met me in the garden and spoke to me of love with more force than usual; he said that, since the time was set, we were just the same as married, and for that matter had been in the eyes of God, ever since our birth. I have no other excuse to offer than my youth, my ignorance and my confidence in him. I gave myself to him before becoming his wife, and eight days afterward he left his father's house; he fled with a woman with whom his new friend had made him acquainted; he wrote that he had set out for Germany and that we would never see him again.

" That is, in a word, the story of my life; my husband knew it as you now know it. I am proud, my child, and I have sworn that no man should ever make me again suffer what I suffered then. I saw you and forgot my oath, but not my sorrow. You must treat me gently; if you are sick, I am also; we must care for each other. You see, Octave, I too know what it is to cherish up memories of the past. It inspires me at times with cruel terror; I should have more courage than you, for perhaps I have suffered more. It is my place to begin; my heart is not

sure of itself, I am still very feeble; my life in this village was so tranquil before you came! I had promised myself that it should never change! All that, makes me exacting. Ah! well, it does not matter, I am yours. You have told me, in your better moments, that Providence appointed me to watch over you as a mother. Yes, when you make me suffer, I do not look upon you as a lover, but as a sick child, fretful and rebellious, that I must care for and cure in order that I may always keep him and love him. May God give me that power!" she added, looking up to heaven. "May God, who sees me, who hears us, may the God of mothers and of lovers, permit me to accomplish that task! When I feel as though I would sink under it, when my pride rebels, when my heart is breaking, when all my life——"

She could not finish; her tears choked her. O God! I saw her there on her knees, her hands clasped on the rock; she swayed in the breeze as did the bushes about us. Frail and sublime creature; she prayed for her love. I raised her in my arms.

"O my only friend!" I cried. "Oh! my mistress, my mother, and my sister! Pray also for me, that I may be able to love you as you deserve. Pray that I may have the courage to live; that my heart may be cleansed in your tears; that it may become a holy offer-

ing before God and that we may share it together."

All was silent about us; above our heads, spread the heavens resplendent with stars.

"Do you remember," I said, "do you remember the first day?"

From that night, we never returned to that spot. That rock was an altar which has retained its purity; it is one of the visions of my life which still passes before my eyes wreathed in spotless white.

CHAPTER IV

As I was crossing the public square one evening, I saw two men standing together; one of them said:

"It appears to me that he has ill-treated her."

"It is her fault," replied the other; "why choose such a man? He has known only public women; she is paying the price of her folly."

I advanced in the darkness to see who was speaking thus, and to hear more if possible; but they passed on as soon as they spied me.

I found Brigitte much disturbed; her aunt was seriously ill; she had time for only a few words with me. I did not see her for an entire week; I knew that she had summoned a physician from Paris; finally, she sent for me.

"My aunt is dead," she said; "I lose the only one left me on earth, I am now alone in the world and I am going to leave the country."

"Am I, then, nothing to you?"

"Yes, my friend; you know that I love you, and I often believe that you love me. But how can I count on you? I am your mistress, alas! but you are not my lover. It is for you that Shakespeare has written these sad words: 'Make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for thy mind is a very opal.' And I, Octave," she added, pointing to her mourning costume, "I am reduced to a single color, and I shall not change it for a long time."

"Leave the country if you choose; I will either kill myself or I will follow you. Ah! Brigitte," I continued, throwing myself on my knees before her, "you thought you were alone when your aunt died! That is the most cruel punishment you could inflict on me; never, have I so keenly felt the misery of my love for you. You must retract those terrible words; I deserve them, but they will kill me. O God! can it be true that I count for nothing in your life, or that I am an influence in your life only because of the evil I have done you!"

"I do not know," she said, "who is busying himself in our affairs; certain insinuations, mixed with idle gossip, have been set afloat in the village and in the neighboring country. Some say that

I have been ruined; others accuse me of imprudence and folly; others represent you as a cruel and dangerous man. Some one has spied into our most secret thoughts; things that I thought no one else knew, events in your life and sad scenes to which they have led, are known to others; my poor aunt spoke to me about it some time since, and she knew it some time before speaking to me. Who knows but what that has hastened her death? When I meet my old friends in the street, they either treat me coldly, or turn aside, even my dear peasant girls, those good girls who love me so much, shrug their shoulders when they see my place empty at the Sunday afternoon balls. How has that come about? I do not know, nor do you, I suppose; but I must go away, I can not endure it. And my aunt's death, so sudden, so unexpected, above all this solitude! this empty room! Courage fails me; my friend, my friend, do not abandon me!"

She wept; in an adjoining room, I saw her household goods in disorder, a trunk on the floor, everything indicating preparations for departure. It was evident that, at the time of her aunt's death, Brigitte tried to go away without seeing me but could not. She was so overwhelmed with emotion that she could hardly speak, her condition was pitiful, and it was I who had brought her to it. Not only was she

unhappy, but she was insulted in public, and the man who ought to be her support and her consolation in such an hour, was the cause of all her troubles.

I felt the wrong I had done her so keenly that I was overcome with shame. After so many promises, so much useless exaltation, so many plans and hopes, what had I, in fact, accomplished in three months! I thought I had a treasure in my heart and there came out of it nothing but malice, the shadow of a dream, and the misfortune of a woman I adored. For the first time, I found myself really face to face with myself; Brigitte reproached me for nothing; she had tried to go away and could not; she was ready to suffer still. I suddenly asked myself if I ought not to leave her, if it was not my duty to flee from her and rid her of the scourge of my presence.

I arose and, passing into the next room, sat down on Brigitte's trunk. There, I leaned my head on my hand and sat motionless. I looked about me at the confused piles of goods. Alas! I knew them all; my heart was not so hardened that it could not be moved by the memories which they awakened. I began to calculate all the harm I had done; I saw my dear Brigitte walking under the lindens with her goat beside her.

"O man!" I mused, "and by what right? How dared you come to this house and lay

hands on this woman? Who has ordained that she should suffer for you? You array yourself in fine linen and set out, sleek and happy, for the home where your mistress languishes; you throw yourself upon the cushions where she has just knelt in prayer, for you and for her, and you gently stroke those delicate hands that still tremble. You think it no evil to inflame a poor heart, and you perorate as warmly in your deliriums of love as the wretched lawyer who comes with red eyes from a suit he has lost. You play the infant prodigy, you make sport of suffering; you find it amusing to occupy your leisure moments, to commit murder by means of little pin pricks. What will you say to the living God when your work is finished? What will become of the woman who loves you? Where will you fall while she leans on you for support? With what face will you one day bury your pale and wretched creature, who has just buried the only being who was left to protect her? Yes, yes, you will doubtless have to bury her, for your love kills and consumes; you have devoted her to the furies and it is she who appeases them. If you follow that woman, you will be the cause of her death. Take care! her guardian angel hesitates; he has just knocked at the door of this house, in order to frighten away a fatal and shameful passion! He inspired Brigitte with the idea of flight; at this moment

he may be whispering in her ear his final warning. O you assassin! You murderer! beware! it is a matter of life and death."

Thus, I communed with myself; then on the sofa I caught sight of a little gingham dress, folded and ready to be packed in the trunk. It had been the witness of our happy days. I took it up and examined it.

"I leave you!" I said to it; "I lose you! O little dress, would you go away without me?"

"No, I can not abandon Brigitte; under the circumstances it would be cowardly. She has just lost her aunt, and is all alone; she is exposed to the power of, I know not what enemy. Can it be Mercanson? He may have spoken of my conversation with him, and seeing that I was jealous of Dalens, may have guessed the rest. Assuredly, he is the snake who has been hissing about my well-beloved flower. I must punish him, and I must repair the wrong I have done Brigitte. Fool that I am! I think of leaving her when I ought to consecrate my life to her, to the expiation of my sins, to rendering her happy after the tears I have drawn from her eyes! When I am her only support in the world, her only friend, her only protection! When I ought to follow her to the end of the world, to shelter her with my body, to console her for having loved me, for having given herself to me!"

"Brigitte!" I cried, returning to her room, "wait an hour for me and I will return."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Wait for me," I replied, "do not set out without me. Remember the words of Ruth: 'Whither thou goest, I shall go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God, where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried.'"

I left her precipitately, and rushed out to find Mercanson. I was told that he had gone out, and I entered his house to wait for him.

I sat in the corner of the room on a priest's chair before a dirty black table. I was becoming impatient when I recalled my duel on account of my first mistress.

"I received a wound from a bullet and am still a fool," I said to myself. "What have I come to do here? This priest will not fight; if I seek a quarrel with him, he will say that his priestly robes forbid and he will continue his vile gossip when I have gone. Moreover, for what can I hold him responsible? What is it that has disturbed Brigitte? They say that her reputation has been sullied, that I ill-treat her and that she ought not to submit to it. What stupidity! that concerns no one, there is nothing to do but allow them to talk; in such a case, to notice an insult is to give it importance. Is it possible to prevent provincials from talking

about their neighbors? Can any one prevent a gossip from maligning a woman who loves? What measures can be taken to stop a public rumor? If they say that I ill-treat her, it is for me to prove the contrary by my conduct with her, and not by violence. It would be as ridiculous to seek a quarrel with Mercanson, as to leave the country on account of gossip. No, we must not leave the country; that would be a bad move; that would be to say to all the world that there is truth in its idle rumors, and to give excuse to the gossips. We must neither go away nor take any notice of such things."

I returned to Brigitte. A half hour had passed, and I had changed my mind three times. I dissuaded her from her plans, I told her what I had just done and why I had not carried out my first impulse. She listened resignedly, yet she wished to go away; the house where her aunt had died had become odious to her, much effort and persuasion on my part were required to get her to consent to remain; finally, I accomplished it. We repeated that we would despise the world, that we would yield nothing, that we would not change our manner of life. I swore that my love should console her for all her sorrows, and she pretended to hope for the best. I told her that this circumstance had so enlightened me in the matter of the wrongs I had done her, that

my conduct would prove my repentance, that I would drive from me, as a fantom, all the evil that remained in my heart, that henceforth she would not be offended, by either my pride or my caprices; and thus, sad and patient, her arms around my neck, she yielded obedience to the pure caprice that I, myself, mistook for a flash of reason.

CHAPTER V

One day, I saw a little chamber she called her oratory; there was no furniture except a prie-dieu and a little altar with a cross and some vases of flowers. As for the rest, the walls and curtains were as white as snow. She shut herself up in that room at times, but rarely since I had known her.

I stepped to the door and saw Brigitte seated on the floor in the middle of the room surrounded by the flowers she was throwing here and there. She held in her hand a little wreath that appeared to be made of dried grass, and she was breaking it to pieces.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She trembled and stood up.

"It is nothing but a child's plaything," she said; "it is a rose wreath that has faded here in the oratory; I have come here to change my

flowers as I have not attended to them for some time."

Her voice trembled, and she appeared to be about to faint. I recalled that name of Brigitte la Rose that I had heard given her. I asked her if it was not her crown of roses that she had just broken thus.

"No," she replied, turning pale.

"Yes," I cried, "yes, on my life. Give me the pieces."

I gathered them up and placed them on the altar, then I was silent, my eyes fixed on the offering.

"Was I not right," she asked, "if it was my crown, to take it from the wall where it has hung so long? What good are these remains? Brigitte la Rose is no more, nor the flowers that baptized her."

She went out; I heard her sob, and the door closed on me; I fell on my knees and wept bitterly.

When I returned to her room, I found her waiting for me; dinner was ready. I took my place in silence, and not a word was said of what was on our hearts.

CHAPTER VI

It was Mercanson who had repeated in the village and in the châteaux my conversation with him about Dalens and the suspicions that, in spite of myself, I had allowed him clearly to see. Every one knows how bad news travels in the provinces, flying from mouth to mouth and growing as it flies; that is what happened in this case.

Brigitte and I found ourselves face to face with each other in a new position. However feebly she may have tried to flee, she had nevertheless made the attempt. It was on account of my prayers that she remained; there was an obligation implied. I was under oath not to grieve her either by my jealousy or my levity; every thoughtless or mocking word that escaped me was a sin, every sorrowful glance from her was a reproach acknowledged and merited.

Her simple, good nature gave a charm even to solitude; she could see me now at all hours without resorting to any precaution. Perhaps she consented to this arrangement in order to prove to me that she valued her love more highly than her reputation; she seemed to regret having shown that she cared for the representations of malice. At any rate, instead of making any attempt to disarm criticism or thwart curiosity,

we lived the freest kind of life, more regardless of public opinion than ever.

For some time, I kept my word and not a cloud troubled our life. These were happy days, but it is not of these that I must speak.

It was said everywhere about the country that Brigitte was living publicly with a libertine from Paris; that her lover ill-treated her, that they spent their time quarreling and that all of it would come to a bad end. As they had praised Brigitte for her conduct in the past, so they blamed her now. There was nothing in her past life, even, that was not picked to pieces and misrepresented. Her lonely tramps over the mountains, when engaged in works of charity, suddenly became the subject of quibbles and of raillery. They spoke of her as of a woman who had lost all human respect and who deserved the frightful misfortunes she was drawing down on her head.

I had told Brigitte that it was best to let them talk and pay no attention to them; but the truth is, it became insupportable to me. I sometimes tried to catch a word that I might consider an insult and demand an explanation. I listened to whispered conversations in a salon where I was a visitor, but could hear nothing; in order to do us better justice, they waited until I had gone. I returned to Brigitte and told her that all these stories were mere nonsense,

that it was foolish to notice them; that they could talk about us as much as they pleased and we would care nothing about it.

Was I not terribly mistaken? If Brigitte was imprudent, was it not my place to be cautious and ward off danger? On the contrary, I took, so to speak, the part of the world against her.

I began by indifference; I was soon to grow malignant.

"It is true," I said, "that they speak evil of your nocturnal excursions. Are you sure that they are wrong? Has nothing happened in those romantic grottoes and by-paths in the forest? Have you never accepted the arm of an unknown as you accepted mine? Was it merely charity that served as your divinity in that beautiful temple of verdure that you visited so bravely?"

Brigitte's glance when I adopted this tone, I shall never forget; I shuddered at it myself. "But, bah," I thought, "she would do the same thing my other mistress did, she would point me out as a ridiculous fool, and I would pay for it all in the eyes of the public."

Between the man who doubts and the man who denies, there is only a step. All philosophy is related to atheism. After having told Brigitte that I suspected her past conduct, I began to regard it with real suspicion.

I came to imagine that Brigitte was deceiv-

ing me, she, who never left me at any hour of the day; I sometimes planned long absences in order to test her, as I supposed; but in truth, it was only to give myself some excuse for suspicion and mockery. And then I took pleasure in observing that I had outgrown my foolish jealousy, which was the same as saying, that I no longer esteemed her highly enough to be jealous of her.

At first, I kept such thoughts to myself, but soon found pleasure in revealing them to Brigitte. We went out for a walk:

" That dress is pretty," I said, " such and such a girl, belonging to one of my friends, has one like it."

We were seated at table.

" Come, my dear, my former mistress used to sing for me at dessert; it is understood that you are to imitate her."

She sat at the piano.

" Ah! pardon me, but will you play that waltz that was so popular last winter; that will remind me of happy times."

Reader, that lasted six months: for six long months, Brigitte, scandalized, exposed to the insults of the world, had to endure from me all the wrongs that a wrathful and cruel libertine could inflict on woman.

Coming from these frightful scenes, in which my own spirit exhausted itself in suffering and

painful contemplation of the past; recovering from that frenzy, a strange access of love, an extreme exaltation, led me to treat my mistress like an idol, like a divinity. A quarter of an hour after having insulted her, I was on my knees before her; when I was not accusing her of some crime, I was begging her pardon; when I was not mocking, I was weeping. Then I was seized by a delirium of joy, I almost lost my reason in the violence of my transports; I did not know what to do, what to say, what to think, in order to repair the evil I had done. I took Brigitte in my arms, and made her repeat a hundred times that she loved me, and that she pardoned me. I threatened to expiate my evil deeds by blowing out my brains, if I ever ill-treated her again. These periods of exaltation sometimes lasted several hours, during which time, I exhausted myself in foolish expressions of love and esteem. Then morning came; day appeared; I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and I awakened with a smile on my lips, mocking at everything, believing in nothing.

During these terrible hours, Brigitte appeared to forget that there was another man in me than the one she saw. When I asked her pardon she shrugged her shoulders as though to say: "Do you not know that I pardon you?" She would not complain as long as a spark of love remained in my heart; she assured me that

all was good and sweet coming from me, insults, as well as tears.

And yet as time passed my evil grew worse, my moments of malignity and irony became more somber and intractable. A real physical fever attended my outbursts of passion; I awakened trembling in every limb and covered with cold sweat. Brigitte, too, although she did not complain of it, began to fail in health. When I began to abuse her she would leave me without a word and lock herself in her room. Thank God, I have never raised my hand against her; in my most violent moments I would rather die than touch her.

One evening the rain was beating against the windows; we were alone, the curtains closed.

"I am in happy humor this evening," I said to Brigitte, "and yet the beastly weather saddens me. Let us seek some diversion in spite of the storm."

I arose and lighted all the candles I could find. The room was small and the illumination brilliant. At the same time a bright fire threw out a stifling heat.

"Come," I said, "what shall we do while waiting until it is time for supper?"

I happened to remember that it was carnival time in Paris. I seemed to see the carriages filled with masks crossing the boulevards. I heard the shouts of the crowds before the the-

aters; I saw the lascivious dances, the gay costumes, the wine and the folly; all of my youth bounded in my heart.

"Let us disguise ourselves," I said to Brigitte. "It will be for us alone, but what does that matter? If you have no costumes we can make them, and pass away the time agreeably."

We searched in the closet for dresses, cloaks, and artificial flowers; Brigitte as usual, was patient and cheerful. We both arranged a sort of travesty; she wanted to dress my hair herself; we painted and powdered ourselves freely; all that we lacked was found in an old chest that belonged, I believe, to the aunt. In an hour we could not recognize each other. The evening passed in singing, in a thousand follies; toward one in the morning it was time for supper.

We had ransacked all the closets; there was one near me that remained open. While sitting down at the table, I perceived on a shelf the book of which I have already spoken, the one in which Brigitte was accustomed to write.

"Is it not a collection of your thoughts?" I asked, stretching out my hand and taking the book down. "If I may, allow me to look at it."

I opened the book, although Brigitte made a gesture as though to prevent me; on the first page I read these words:

"This is my last will and testament."

Everything was written in a firm hand; I found, first, a faithful recital of all that Brigitte had suffered on my account since she had been my mistress. She announced her firm determination to endure everything, so long as I loved her and to die when I left her. Her daily life was recorded there; what she had lost, what she had hoped, the isolation she experienced even in my presence, the barrier that was growing up between us, the cruelties I subjected her to in return for her love and her resignation—all that was written down without a complaint; on the contrary, she undertook to justify me. Then followed personal details, the disposition of her effects. She would end her life by poison, she wrote. She would die by her own hand and expressly forbid that her death should be charged to me. "Pray for him," such were her last words.

I found in the closet, on the same shelf, a little box that I remembered I had seen before, filled with a fine bluish powder resembling salt.

"What is this?" I asked of Brigitte, raising the box to my lips. She gave vent to a scream of terror and threw herself upon me.

"Brigitte," I said, "tell me adieu. I shall carry this box away with me; you will forget me, and you will live if you wish to save me from becoming a murderer. I will set out this very night; you will agree with me that God demands it. Give me a last kiss."

I bent over her and kissed her forehead.

"Not yet," she cried in anguish. But I repulsed her and left the room.

Three hours later I was ready to set out, and the horses were at the door. It was still raining when I entered the carriage. At the moment the carriage was starting, I felt two arms about my neck and a sob on my breast.

It was Brigitte. I did all I could to persuade her to remain; I ordered the driver to stop; I even told her that I would return to her when time should have effaced the memory of the wrongs I had done her. I forced myself to prove to her that yesterday was the same as to-day, to-day as yesterday; I repeated that I could only render her unhappy, that to attach herself to me was but to make an assassin of me. I resorted to prayers, to vows, to threats even; her only reply was, "You are going away, take me, let us take leave of the country, let us take leave of the past. We can not live here, let us go elsewhere, wherever you please, let us go and die together in some remote corner of the world. We must be happy, I by you, you by me."

I kissed her with such passion that I feared my heart would burst.

"Drive on," I cried to the coachman. We threw ourselves into each other's arms, and the horses set out at a gallop.

PART V.

CHAPTER I

HAVING decided on a long tour, we went first to Paris; the necessary preparations required time and we took a furnished apartment for one month.

The decision to leave France had changed everything: joy, hope, confidence, all returned; no more sorrow, no more grief over approaching separation. It was now nothing but dreams of happiness and vows of eternal love; I wished, once for all, to make my dear mistress forget all the suffering I had caused her. How had I been able to resist such proofs of tender affection and courageous resignation? Not only did Brigitte pardon me, but she was willing to make a still greater sacrifice and leave everything for me. As I felt myself unworthy of the devotion she exhibited, I wished to requite her by my love; at last, my good angel had triumphed, and admiration and love resumed their sway in my heart.

Brigitte and I examined a map to determine where we should go to bury ourselves from the

world; we had not yet decided and we found pleasure in that very uncertainty; while glancing over the map, we said:

"Where shall we go? What shall we do? Where shall we begin life anew?"

How shall I tell how deeply I repented my cruelty when I looked upon her smiling face, a face that laughed at the future, although still pale from the sorrows of the past! Happy projects of future joy, you are, perhaps, the only true happiness known to man!

For eight days we spent our time making purchases and preparing for our departure; then a young man presented himself at our apartments: he brought letters to Brigitte. After their interview, I found her sad and distraught; but I could not guess the cause, unless the letters were from N——, that village where I had confessed my love and where Brigitte's only relatives lived.

Nevertheless, our preparations progressed rapidly and I became impatient to get away; at the same time, I was so happy that I could hardly rest. When I arose in the morning, and the sun was shining through our windows, I experienced such transports of joy that I was almost intoxicated with happiness. So anxious was I to prove the sincerity of my love for Brigitte, that I hardly dared kiss the hem of her dress. Her lightest words made me tremble

as though her voice was strange to me; I alternated between tears and laughter, and I never spoke of the past except with horror and disgust.

Our room was full of our goods scattered about in disorder, albums, pictures, books, and the dear map we loved so much. We were going and coming about the room; every few moments I would stop and kneel before Brigitte, who would call me an idler, saying that she had to do all the work, and that I was good for nothing; and all sorts of projects flitted through our minds. Sicily was far away, but the winters are so delightful there! Genoa is very pretty with its painted houses, its green gardens and the Apennines in the background! But what noise! What crowds! Out of every three men on the street, one is a monk and another a soldier. Florence is sad, it is the Middle Ages living in the midst of modern life. How can any one endure those grilled windows and that horrible brown color with which all the houses are soiled? What could we do at Rome? We are not traveling in order to forget ourselves, much less for the sake of instruction. To the Rhine? But the season is over, and although we do not care for the world of fashion, still it is sad to visit its haunts when it has fled them. But Spain? Too many restrictions there; one has to travel like an army on the march and may expect everything except repose. Let us go to Switzer-

land! Too many people go there, and most of them are deceived as to the nature of its attractions; but it is there, are unfolded the three most beautiful colors on God's earth: the azure of the sky, the verdure of the plains, and the whiteness of the snows on the summits of glaciers.

"Let us go, let us go," cried Brigitte, "let us fly away like two birds. Let us pretend, my dear Octave, that we just met each other yesterday. You met me at a ball, I pleased you and I love you; you tell me that some leagues distant, in a certain little town you loved a certain Madame Pierson; what passed between you and her I do not know. You will not tell me the story of your love for another! And I will whisper to you that not long since, I loved a terrible fellow who made me very unhappy; you will reprove me and close my mouth, and we will agree never to speak of such things."

When Brigitte spoke thus, I experienced a feeling that resembled avarice; I caught her in my arms and cried:

"O God! I know not whether it is with joy or with fear that I tremble. I am about to carry off my treasure. Die, my youth, die all memories of the past, die, all cares and regrets! O my good, brave mistress! You have made a man out of a child. If I lose you now, I will never love again. Perhaps, before I knew you, another woman might have cured me; but now

you, alone, of all the world, have power to destroy me or to save me, for I bear on my heart the wound of all the evil I have done you. I have been an ingrate, blind and cruel. God be praised! You love me still. If you ever return to that home under whose lindens, where I first met you, look carefully about that deserted house; you will find a fantom there, for the man who left it, and went away with you, is not the man who entered it."

"Is it true?" said Brigitte, and her head, all radiant with love, was raised to heaven; "is it true that I am yours? Yes, far from this odious world in which you have grown old before your time—yes, my child, you are going to love. I will have you, such as you are, and wherever we go you will forget the day when you will no longer love me. My mission will have been accomplished, and I shall always be thankful for it."

Finally, we decided to go to Geneva and then choose some resting-place in the Alps. Brigitte was enthusiastic about the lake; I thought I could already breathe the air which floats over its surface and the odor of the verdure-clad valley; already Lausanne, Vevay, Oberland and beyond the summits of Monte Rosa and the immense plain of Lombardy; already, oblivion, repose, flight, all the delights of happy solitude, invited us; already, when in the evening with

joined hands, we looked at one another in silence, we felt rising within us that sentiment of strange grandeur which takes possession of the heart on the eve of a long journey, mysterious and indescribable vertigo, which has in it something of the terrors of exile and the hopes of a pilgrimage. Are there not in the human mind wings that flutter and sonorous chords that vibrate? How shall I describe it? Is there not a world of meaning in the simple words: "All is ready, we are about to go"?

Suddenly, Brigitte became languid; she bowed her head and was silent. When I asked her if she was in pain, she said no, in a voice that was scarcely audible; when I spoke of our departure, she arose, cold and resigned, and continued her preparations; when I swore to her that she was going to be happy and that I would consecrate my life to her, she shut herself up in her room and wept; when I kissed her, she turned pale and averted her eyes as my lips approached hers; when I told her that nothing had yet been done, that it was not too late to renounce our plans, she frowned severely; when I begged her to open her heart to me and I told her I would die rather than cause her one regret, she threw her arms about my neck, then stopped and repulsed me as though involuntarily. Finally, I entered her room holding in my hand a ticket on which our places were marked for the

carriage to Besançon. I approached her and placed it in her lap; she stretched out her hand, screamed and fell unconscious at my feet.

CHAPTER II

All my efforts to divine the cause of so unexpected a change were as vain as the questions I had first asked. Brigitte was ill and obstinately remained silent. After an entire day passed in supplication and conjecture, I went out without knowing where I was going. Passing the Opera, I entered it from force of habit.

I could pay no attention to what was going on in the theater. I was so overwhelmed with grief, so stupefied, that I did not live, so to speak, except in myself, and exterior objects made no impression on my senses. All my powers were centered on a single thought, and the more I turned it over in my head, the less clearly could I distinguish its meaning. What obstacle was this that had so suddenly come between us and the realization of our fondest hopes? If it was merely some ordinary event, or even an actual misfortune, such as an accident or loss of some friend, why that obstinate silence? After all that Brigitte had done, when our dreams seemed about to be realized, what could be the nature of a secret that destroyed

our happiness and could not be confided to me? What! she conceals it from me! And yet I could not find it in my heart to suspect her. The appearance of suspicion revolted me and filled me with horror. On the other hand, how could I conceive of inconstancy or of caprice in that woman such as I knew her? I was lost in the abyss of doubt and I could not discover a gleam of light, the smallest point on which to base conjecture.

In front of me in the gallery, sat a young man whose face was not unknown to me. As often happens when one is preoccupied, I looked at him without thinking of him as a personal identity or trying to fit a name on him. Suddenly, I recognized him: it was he, who had brought letters to Brigitte from N——. I arose and started to accost him without thinking what I was doing. He occupied a place that I could not reach without disturbing a large number of spectators and I was forced to await the entr'acte.

My first thought was that if any one could enlighten me it was this young man. He had had several interviews with Madame Pierson the last few days, and I recalled the fact that she was always much depressed after his visits. He had seen her the morning of the day she was taken ill. The letters he brought Brigitte had not been shown me; it was possible that he knew

the reason why our departure was delayed. Perhaps he did not know all the circumstances, but he could, doubtless, enlighten me as to the contents of those letters, and there was no reason why I should hesitate about questioning him. When the curtain fell, I followed him to the foyer; I do not know that he saw me coming, but he hastened away and entered a box. I determined to wait until he should come out, and stood looking at the box for fifteen minutes. At last, he appeared. I bowed and approached him. He hesitated a moment, then turned and disappeared down a stairway.

My desire to speak to him had been too evident to admit of any other explanation than deliberate intention to avoid me on his part. He surely knew my face, and whether he knew it or not, a man who sees another approaching him, ought, at least, to wait for him. We were the only ones in the corridor at the time and there could be no doubt he did not wish to speak to me. I did not dream of such impertinent treatment from a man, whom I had cordially received at my apartments; why should he insult me? He could have no other excuse than a desire to avoid an awkward interview, during which questions might be asked, which he did not care to answer. But why? This second mystery troubled me almost as much as the first. Although I tried to drive the thought from my

head, that young man's action in avoiding me seemed to have some connection with Brigitte's obstinate silence.

Uncertainty is of all torments, the most difficult to endure, and during my life I have exposed myself to many dangers because I could not wait patiently. When I returned to my apartments, I found Brigitte reading those same fateful letters from N——. I told her that I could not remain longer in suspense, and that I wished to be relieved from it at any cost; that I desired to know the cause of the sudden change which had taken place in her, and that if she refused to speak I would look upon her silence as a positive refusal to go abroad with me and an order for me to leave her forever.

She reluctantly handed me the letters she was reading. Her relatives had written her that her departure had disgraced them, that every one knew the circumstances, and that they felt it their duty to warn her of the consequences; that she was living openly as my mistress, and that, although she was a widow and free to do as she chose, she ought to think of the name she bore; that neither they nor her old friends would ever see her again if she persisted in her course; finally, by all sorts of threats and entreaties, they urged her to return.

The tone of that letter angered me, and at first I took it as an insult.

"And that young man who brings you these remonstrances," I cried, "doubtless has orders to deliver them personally, and does not fail to do his own part to the best of his ability. Am I not right?"

Brigitte's dejection made me reflect and calm my wrath.

"You will do as you wish, and achieve my ruin," she said. "My fate rests with you, you have been for a long time my master. Avenge as you please the last effort my old friends have made to recall me to reason, to the world that I formerly respected, to the honor that I have lost. I have not a word to say, and if you wish to dictate my reply, I will obey you."

"I care to know nothing," I replied, "but your intentions; it is for me to comply with your wishes, and I assure you I am ready to do it. Tell me, do you desire to remain, to go away, or shall I go alone?"

"Why that question?" asked Brigitte; "have I said that I had changed my mind? I am unwell and can not travel in my present condition, but when I recover we will go to Geneva as we have planned."

We separated at these words, and the coldness with which she had expressed her resolution saddened me more than a refusal. It was not the first time our liaison had been threatened by her relatives; but up to this time, whatever

letters Brigitte had received she had never taken so much to heart. How could I bring myself to believe that Brigitte had been so affected by protests which, in less happy moments, had had no effect on her? Could it be merely the weakness of a woman who recoils from an act of final significance? I will do as you please, she had said. No, it does not please me to demand patience, and rather than look at that sorrowful face even a week longer, unless she speaks, I will set out alone.

Fool that I was! Had I the strength to do it? I did not close my eyes that night, and the next morning I resolved to call on that young man I had seen at the Opera. I do not know whether it was wrath or curiosity that impelled me to this course, nor did I know just what I desired to learn of him; but I reflected that he could not avoid me this time, and that was all I wanted.

As I did not know his address, I asked Brigitte for it, pretending that I felt under obligations to call on him after all the visits he had made us; I had not said a word about my experience at the Opera. Brigitte's eyes betrayed signs of tears. When I entered her room she held out her hand, and said:

"What do you wish?"

Her voice was sad but tender. We exchanged a few kind words and I set out less unhappy.

The name of the young man I was going to see was Smith; he was living near by. When I knocked at his door, I experienced a strange sensation of uneasiness; I was dazed, as though by a sudden flash of light. His first gesture froze my blood. He was in bed, and with the same accent Brigitte had employed, with a face as pale and haggard as hers, he held out his hand and said:

"What do you wish?"

Say what you please, there are things in a man's life which the reason can not explain. I sat still, as though awakened from a dream, and began to repeat his questions. Why, in fact, had I come to see him? How could I tell him what had brought me there? Even if he had anything to tell me, how did I know he would speak? He had brought letters from N——, and knew those who had written them. But it cost me an effort to question him, and I feared he would suspect what was in my mind. Our first words were polite and insignificant. I thanked him for his kindness in bringing letters to Madame Pierson; I told him that upon leaving France we would ask him to do the same favor for us; and then we were silent, surprised to find ourselves vis-à-vis.

I looked about me in embarrassment. His room was on the fourth floor; everything indicated honest and industrious poverty. Some

books, musical instruments, papers, a table and a few chairs, that was all, but everything was well cared for and presented an agreeable ensemble.

As for him, his frank and animated face predisposed me in his favor. On the mantel, I observed a picture of an old lady. I stepped up to look at it, and he said it was his mother.

I then recalled that Brigitte had often spoken of him; she had known him since childhood. Before I came to the country, she used to see him occasionally at N——, but at the time of her last visit there he was away. It was, therefore, only by chance that I had learned some particulars of his life, which now came to mind. He had an honest employment that enabled him to support his sister and mother.

His treatment of these two women deserved the highest praise; he deprived himself of everything for them, but, although he possessed musical talents that would have enabled him to make a fortune, the immediate needs of those dependent on him, and an extreme reserve, had always led him to prefer an assured income to the uncertain chances of success in larger ventures. In a word, he belonged to that small class who live quietly, and who are worth more to the world than those who do not appreciate them. I had learned of certain traits in his character which will serve to paint the man: he had fallen in

love with a beautiful girl in the neighborhood, and, after a year of devotion to her, secured her parents' consent to their union. She was as poor as he. The contract was ready to be signed, the preparations for the wedding complete, when his mother said:

"And your sister? Who will marry her?"

That simple remark made him understand that if he married, he would spend all his money in the household expenses and his sister would have no dowry. He broke off the engagement, bravely renouncing his happy prospects; he then came to Paris.

When I heard that story, I wanted to see the hero. That simple, unassuming act of devotion seemed to me more admirable than all the glories of war.

The more I examined that young man, the less I felt inclined to broach the subject nearest my heart. The idea which had first occurred to me that he would harm me in Brigitte's eyes, vanished at once. Gradually, my thoughts took another course; I looked at him attentively, and it seemed to me that he was also examining me with curiosity.

We were both twenty-one years of age, but what a difference between us! He was accustomed to an existence regulated by the graduated tick of the clock; never having seen anything of life, except that part of it which lies between an

obscure room on the fourth floor and a dingy government office; sending his mother all his savings—that farthing of human joy which the hand of toil clasps so greedily; having no thought except for the happiness of others, and that since his childhood, since he had been a babe in arms! And I, during that precious time, so swift, so inexorable, during that time, that with him was bathed in sweat, what had I done? Was I a man? Which of us had lived?

What I have said in a page, can be comprehended in a glance. He spoke to me of our journey and the countries we were going to visit.

"When do you go?" he asked.

"I do not know; Madame Pierson is unwell and has been confined to her bed for three days."

"For three days!" he repeated in surprise.

"Yes; why are you astonished?"

He arose and threw himself on me, his arms extended, his eyes fixed. He was trembling violently.

"Are you ill?" I asked, taking him by the hand. He pressed his hand to his head and burst into tears. When he had recovered sufficiently to speak, he said:

"Pardon me; be good enough to leave me. I fear I am not well; when I have sufficiently recovered, I will return your visit.

CHAPTER III

BRIGITTE was better. She had informed me that she wished to go away as soon as she was well enough to travel. But I insisted that she ought to rest at least fifteen days before undertaking a long journey.

Whenever I attempted to persuade her to speak frankly, she assured me that the letter was the only cause of her melancholy and begged me to say nothing more about it. Then I tried in vain to guess what was passing in her heart. We went to the theater every night in order to avoid embarrassing tête-à-têtes. There, we sometimes pressed each other's hands at some fine bit of acting or beautiful strain of music, or exchanged, perhaps, a friendly glance, but going and returning we were mute, absorbed in our thoughts.

Smith came almost every day. Although his presence in the house had been the cause of all my sorrow, and although my visit to him had left singular suspicions in my mind, still his apparent good faith and his simplicity reassured me. I had spoken to him of the letters he had brought, and he did not appear offended, but saddened. He was ignorant of the contents and his friendship for Brigitte led him to censure them severely. He would have refused to carry

them, he said, if he knew what they contained. On account of Brigitte's tone of reserve in his presence, I did not think he was in her confidence. I therefore welcomed him with pleasure, although there was always a sort of awkward embarrassment in our meeting. He was asked to act as intermediary between Brigitte and her relatives after our departure. When we three were together, he noticed a certain coldness and restraint which he endeavored to banish by cheerful good humor. If he spoke of our liaison, it was with respect and as a man who looks upon love as a sacred bond; in fact, he was a kind friend, and he inspired me with full confidence.

But despite all that, despite all his efforts, he was sad, and I could not obliterate strange thoughts that came to my mind. The tears I had seen that young man shed, his illness coming on at the same time as Brigitte's, I know not what melancholy sympathy I thought I discovered between them, troubled and disquieted me. Not over a month ago, I would have become violently jealous; but now, of what could I suspect Brigitte? Whatever the secret she was concealing from me, was she not going away with me? Even if it were possible that Smith could be in some secret of which I knew nothing, what could be the nature of that mystery? What was there to be censured in their sadness

and in their friendship? She had known him as a child; she met him again, after long years, just as she was about to leave France; she chanced to be in an unfortunate situation, and fate decreed that he should be the instrument of adding to her sorrow. Was it not natural that they should exchange sorrowful glances, that the sight of this young man should awaken memories and regrets? Could he, on the other hand, see her start off on a long journey, proscribed and almost abandoned, without grave apprehensions? I felt that this must be the explanation and that it was my duty to assure them that I was capable of protecting the one from all dangers, and of requiting the other for the services he had rendered. And yet, a deadly sense of coldness oppressed me and I could not determine what course to pursue.

When Smith left us in the evening, we either kept silence or talked of him. I do not know what fatal attraction led me to ask about him continually. She, however, told me just what I have told the reader; his life had never been other than it was at this time, poor, obscure and honest. I made her repeat the story of his life a number of times, without knowing why I took such an interest in it.

There was in my heart a secret cause of sorrow which I would not confess. If that young man had arrived at the time of our greatest hap-

piness, had he brought an insignificant letter to Brigitte, had he pressed her hand while assisting her into the carriage, would I have paid the least attention to it? Had he recognized me at the opera or had he not, had he shed tears for some unknown reason, what would it matter so long as I was happy? But, while unable to divine the cause of Brigitte's sorrow, I saw that my past conduct, whatever she might say of it, had something to do with her present state. If I had been what I ought to have been for the last six months that we had lived together, nothing in the world, I was persuaded, could have troubled our love. Smith was only an ordinary man, but he was good and devoted, his simple and modest qualities resembled the large, pure lines which the eye seized at the first glance; one became acquainted with him in a quarter of an hour, and he inspired confidence if not admiration. I could not help thinking that if he were Brigitte's lover, she would cheerfully go with him to the ends of the earth.

I had deferred our departure purposely, but now I began to regret it. Brigitte, too, at times urged me to hasten the day.

" Why do we wait? " she asked. " Here I am recovered and everything is ready."

Why did we wait, indeed? I do not know.

Seated near the fire, my eyes wandered from Smith to my mistress. I saw that they were

both pale, serious, silent. I did not know why they were thus, and I could not help repeating that there was but one cause, but one secret to learn; but that was not one of those vague, sickly suspicions, such as had formerly tormented me, but an instinct, persistent and fatal. What strange creatures we! It pleased me to leave them alone before the fire and to go out on the quay to dream, leaning on the parapet and looking at the water. When they spoke of their life at N——, and when Brigitte, almost cheerful, assumed a motherly air to recall some incident of their childhood days, it seemed to me that I suffered, and yet took pleasure in it. I asked questions; I spoke to Smith of his mother, of his plans and his prospects. I gave him an opportunity to show himself in a favorable light and forced his modesty to reveal his merit.

"You love your sister very much, do you not?" I asked. "When do you expect her to marry?"

He blushed and replied that his expenses were rather heavy but that it would probably be within two years, perhaps sooner, if his health would permit him to do some extra work which would bring in enough to provide her dowry; that there was a family in the country, whose eldest son was her friend; that they were almost agreed on it, and that fortune would one day come, like rest, without thinking of it; that he

had set aside for his sister, a part of the money left by their father; that their mother was opposed to it but that he would insist on it; that a young man may live from hand to mouth, but that the fate of a young girl is fixed on the day of her marriage. Thus, little by little, he expressed what was in his heart, and I watched Brigitte listening to him. Then, when he arose to leave us, I accompanied him to the door and stood there, pensively listening to the sound of his footsteps on the stairs.

Upon examining our trunks, we found that there were still a few things needed before we could start; Smith was asked to purchase them. He was remarkably active and enjoyed attending to matters of this kind. When I returned to my apartments, I found him on the floor, strapping a trunk. Brigitte was at the piano we had rented by the week during our stay. She was playing one of those old airs, into which she put so much expression and which were so dear to us. I stopped in the hall; every note reached my ear distinctly; never had she sung so sadly, so divinely.

Smith was listening with pleasure; he was on his knees holding the buckle of the strap in his hands. He fastened it, then looked about the room at the other goods he had packed and covered with a linen cloth. Satisfied with his work, he still remained kneeling in the same spot;

Brigitte, her hands on the keys, was looking out at the horizon. For the second time, I saw tears fall from the young man's eyes; I was ready to shed tears myself, and not knowing what was passing in me, I held out my hand to him.

"Were you there?" asked Brigitte. She trembled and seemed surprised.

"Yes, I was there," I replied. "Sing, my dear, I beg of you. Let me hear your sweet voice."

She continued her song without a word; she noticed my emotion as well as Smith's; her voice faltered. With the last notes, she arose and came to me and kissed me.

On another occasion, I had bought an album containing views of Switzerland. We were looking at them, all three of us, and when Brigitte found a site that pleased her, she would stop to examine it. There was one view that seemed to please her more than all the others; it was a certain spot in the canton of Vaud, some distance from Brigues; some trees with cows grazing in the shade; in the distance, a village consisting of some dozen houses, scattered here and there. In the foreground, a young girl with a large straw hat, seated under a tree, and a farmer's boy standing before her, apparently pointing out, with his iron-tipped stick, the route over which he had come; he was directing her attention to a winding path that led to the moun-

tain. Above them were the Alps, and the picture was crowned by three snow-capped summits. Nothing could be more simple or more beautiful than this landscape. The valley resembled a lake of verdure and the eye followed its contour with delight.

"Shall we go there?" I asked Brigitte. I took a pencil and traced some figures on the picture.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I am trying to see if I can not change that face slightly and make it resemble yours. The pretty hat would become you and can I not, if I am skilful, give that fine mountaineer some resemblance to me?"

The whim seemed to please her and she set about rubbing out the two faces. When I had painted her portrait, she wished to try mine. The faces were very small, hence not very difficult; it was agreed that the likenesses were striking. While we were laughing at it, the door opened and I was called away by the servant.

When I returned, Smith was leaning on the table and looking at the picture with interest. He was absorbed in a profound reverie and was not aware of my presence; I sat down near the fire and it was not until I spoke to Brigitte that he raised his head. He looked at us a moment, then hastily took his leave and, as he approached

the door, I saw him strike his forehead with his hand.

When I discovered these signs of grief, I said to myself: "What does it mean?" Then I clasped my hands to plead with—whom? I do not know; perhaps my good angel, perhaps my evil destiny.

CHAPTER IV

My heart yearned to set out and yet I delayed; some secret influence rooted me to the spot.

When Smith came, I knew no repose from the time he entered the room. How is it that we frequently seem to enjoy unhappiness?

One day a word, a flush, a glance, made me shudder; another day, another glance, another word, threw me into uncertainty. Why are they both so sad? Why am I as motionless as a statue where I had formerly been violent? Every evening I sat on my bed and said to myself: "Let me see; let me think that over." Then I sprang to my feet crying: "Impossible!" The next day, I did the same thing.

In Smith's presence, Brigitte treated me with more tenderness than when we were alone. It happened one evening that some hard words escaped us; when she heard his voice in the hall,

she came and sat on my knees. As for him, it seemed to me he was always making an effort to control himself. His gestures were carefully regulated; he spoke slowly and prudently, so that his occasional moments of forgetfulness seemed all the more striking.

Was it curiosity that tormented me? I remember that one day I saw a man drowning near *Pont Royale*. It was midsummer and we were rowing on the river; some thirty boats were crowded together under the bridge when, suddenly, one of the occupants of a boat near mine threw up his hands and fell overboard. We immediately began diving for him, but in vain; some hours later the body was found under a raft.

I shall never forget my experience as I was diving for that man. I opened my eyes under the water and searched painfully here and there in the dark corners about the pier; then I returned to the surface for breath, then resumed my horrible search. I was filled with hope and terror; the thought that I might feel myself seized by convulsive arms, allured me and, at the same time, thrilled me with horror; when I was exhausted with fatigue, I climbed back into my boat.

Unless a man is brutalized by debauchery, eager curiosity is one of his marked traits. I have already remarked that I felt it on the oc-

casion of my first visit to Desgenais. I will explain my meaning.

The truth, that skeleton of appearances, ordains that every man, whatsoever he be, shall come, in his day and hour, to touch the bones that lie forever at the bottom of some chance experience. It is called knowing the world, and experience is purchased at that price. It happens that some recoil in terror before that test, others, feeble and affrighted, vacillate like shadows. Some, the best perhaps, die at once. The large number forget, and thus, all float on to death.

But there are some men, who, at the fell stroke of misfortune, neither die nor forget; when it comes their turn to touch misfortune, otherwise called truth, they approach it with a firm step and outstretched hand, and horrible to say! they mistake love for the livid corpse they have found at the bottom of the river. They seize it, feel it, clasp it in their arms; behold them, drunk with the desire to know; they no longer look with interest upon things, except to see them pass; they do nothing except doubt and test; they ransack the world as though they were God's spies; they sharpen their thoughts into arrows, and they give birth to a monster.

The debauchees, more than all others, are exposed to that fury, and the reason is very simple: ordinary life is the limpid surface; the

debauchees, the rapid current turning over and over, and, at times, touching the bottom. Coming from a ball, for instance, where they have danced with a modest girl, they seek the company of bad characters, and spend the night in riotous feasting. The last words they addressed to a beautiful and virtuous woman are still on their lips; they repeat them and burst into laughter. Shall I say it? Do they not raise, for some pieces of silver, the vesture of chastity, that robe so full of mystery, that seems to respect the being it embellishes and surrounds without touching? What idea can they have of the world? They are like comedians in the green-room. Who, more than they, is skilled in that research at the bottom of things, in that groping, profound and impious? See how they speak of everything; always in terms the most barren, the most crude and abject; such words appear true to them; all the rest is only parade, convention, prejudice. Let them tell a story, let them recount some experience, they will always use the same dirty and material expression, always the letter, always death! They do not say "That woman loved me;" they say: "I have possessed that woman;" they do not say: "I love;" they say: "I desire;" they never say: "If God wills;" they say: "If I will." I do not know what they think of themselves and such monologues as these.

Hence, of a necessity, either idleness or curiosity; for while they strive to find what there is of evil, they do not understand that others still believe in the good. Therefore, they are either so nonchalant that they stop their ears, or the noise of the rest of the world suddenly startles them from sleep. The father allows his son to go where so many others go, where Cato himself went; he says that youth is but a stage. But when he returns, the youth looks upon his sister; and sees what has taken place in him during an hour passed in the society of brutal reality! He says to himself: "My sister is not like that creature I have just left!" And from that day he is disturbed and uneasy.

Sinful curiosity is a vile malady born of all impure contact. It is the prowling instinct of fantoms who raise the lids of tombs; it is an inexplicable torture with which God punishes those who have sinned; they wish to believe that all sin as they have done, and would be disappointed perhaps to find that it was not so. But they inquire, they search, they dispute; they hang their heads on one side, as does an architect who adjusts a pillar, and thus strive to find what they desire to know. Given proof of evil, they laugh at it; doubtful of evil, they swear that it exists; the good, they refuse to recognize. "Who knows?" Behold the grand formula, the first words that Satan spoke when he saw

heaven closing against him. Alas! how many evils are those words responsible for! How many disasters and deaths, how many strokes of terrible scythes in the ripening harvest of humanity! How many hearts, how many families where there is naught but ruin, since that word was first heard! "Who knows! Who knows!" Loathsome words! Rather than pronounce them, one should do as the sheep who graze about the slaughter-house and know it not. That is better than to be a strong spirit and read La Rochefoucauld.

What better illustration could I present than the one I have just given? My mistress was ready to set out and I had but to say the word. Why did I delay? What would have been the result if I had started at once on our trip? Nothing but a moment of apprehension that would have been forgotten after traveling three days. When with me, she had no thought but of me; why should I care to solve the mystery that did not threaten my happiness?

She would have consented and that would have been the end of it. A kiss on her lips and all would be well; instead of that, see what I did.

One evening when Smith had dined with us, I retired at an early hour and left them together. As I closed my door, I heard Brigitte order some tea. In the morning I happened to approach her table, and, sitting beside the teapot, I saw

but one cup. No one had been in that room before me that morning, so the servant could not have carried away anything that had been used the night before. I searched everywhere for a second cup but could find none.

"Did Smith stay late?" I asked of Brigitte.

"He left about midnight."

"Did you retire alone or did you call some one to assist you?"

"I retired alone; every one in the house was asleep."

I continued my search and my hands trembled. In what burlesque comedy is there a jealous lover, so stupid as to inquire what has become of a cup? Why seek to discover whether Smith and Madame Pierson had drunk from the same cup? What a brilliant idea, that!

Nevertheless, I found the cup and I burst into laughter and threw it on the floor with such violence that it broke into a thousand pieces. I ground the pieces under my feet.

Brigitte looked at me without saying a word. During the two succeeding days, she treated me with a coldness that had something of contempt in it, and I saw that she treated Smith with more deference and kindness than usual. She called him, Henry, and smiled on him sweetly.

"I feel that the air would do me good," she said after dinner; "shall we go to the Opera, Octave? I would enjoy walking that far."

"No, I will stay here; go without me." She took Smith's arm and went out. I remained alone all the evening; I had paper before me and I was trying to collect my thoughts in order to write, but in vain.

As a lonely lover draws from his bosom a letter from his mistress, and loses himself in delightful reverie, thus I shut myself up in solitude and yielded to the sweet allurement of doubt. Before me, were the two empty seats which Brigitte and Smith had just occupied; I scrutinized them eagerly as though they could tell me something. I revolved in my mind all the things I had heard and seen; from time to time, I went to the door and cast my eyes over our trunks which had been piled against the wall for a month; I opened them and examined the contents so carefully packed away by those delicate little hands; I listened to the sound of passing carriages; the slightest noise made me tremble. I spread out on the table our map of Europe, and there in the very presence of all my hopes, in that room where I had conceived and had so nearly realized them, I abandoned myself to the most frightful presentiments.

But strange as it may seem, I felt neither anger nor jealousy, but a terrible sense of sorrow and foreboding. I did not suspect, and yet, I doubted. The mind of man is so strangely formed that, with what he sees, and in spite of

what he sees, he can conjure up a hundred objects of woe. In truth, his brain resembles the dungeons of the Inquisition whose walls are covered with so many instruments of torture, that one is dazed and asks whether these horrible contrivances he sees before him are pincers or playthings. Tell me, I say, what difference is there in saying to my mistress: "All women deceive," or, "You deceive me?"

What passed through my mind was perhaps as subtle as the finest sophistry; it was a sort of dialogue between the mind and the conscience. "If I should lose Brigitte?" I said to the mind.—"She departs with you," said the conscience.—"If she deceives me?"—"How can she deceive you? Has she not made out her will asking for prayers for you?"—"If Smith loves her?"—"Fool! What does it matter so long as you know that she loves you?"—"If she loves me, why is she sad?"—"That is her secret, respect it."—"If I take her away with me, will she be happy?"—"Love her and she will be."—"Why, when that man looks at her, does she seem to fear to meet his glance?"—"Because she is a woman and he is young."—"Why does that young man turn pale when she looks at him?"—"Because he is a man and she is beautiful."—"Why, when I went to see him, did he throw himself into my arms, and why did he weep and beat his head with his hands?"—"Do

not seek to know of what you must remain ignorant."—"Why can I not know these things?"—"Because you are miserable and weak, and all mystery is of God."—"But why is it that I suffer? Why is it that my soul recoils in terror?"—"Think of your father and do good."—"But why am I unable to do as he did? Why does evil attract me to itself?"—"Get down on your knees and confess; if you believe in evil it is because your ways have been evil."—"If my ways were evil, was it my fault? Why did the good betray me?"—"Because you are in the shadow, would you deny the existence of light? If there are traitors, why are you one of them?"—"Because I am afraid of becoming the dupe."—"Why do you spend your nights in watching? Why are you alone now?"—"Because I think, I doubt and I fear."—"When will you offer your prayer?"—"When I believe. Why have they lied to me?"—"Why do you lie, coward! at this very moment? Why not die if you can not suffer?"

Thus, spoke and groaned within me two voices, voices that were defiant and terrible; and then, a third voice cried out: "Alas! Alas! my innocence! Alas! Alas! the days that were!"

CHAPTER V

WHAT a powerful lever is the human thought! It is our defense and our safeguard, the most beautiful present that God has made us. It is ours and it obeys us; we may shoot it forth into space, and, once outside of this feeble head, it is gone, we can no longer control it.

While I was deferring the time of our departure from day to day, I was gradually losing strength, and, although I did not perceive it, my vital forces were slowly wasting away. When I sat at table, I experienced a violent distaste for food; at night two pale faces, that of Brigitte and of Smith, pursued me through frightful dreams. When they went to the theater in the evening, I refused to go with them; then, I went alone and concealed myself in the parquet and watched them. I pretended that I had some business to attend to in a neighboring room and I sat there an hour and listened to them. The idea occurred to me to seek a quarrel with Smith and force him to fight with me; I turned my back on him while he was talking; then he came to me with a look of surprise on his face, holding out his hand. When I was alone in the night and every one slept, I felt a strong desire to go to Brigitte's desk and take from it, her papers. On one occasion, I was

obliged to go out of the house in order to resist the temptation. One day I felt like arming myself with a knife and threatening to kill them if they did not tell me why they were so sad; another day I turned all this fury against myself. With what shame do I write it! And if any one should ask me why I acted thus, I could not reply.

To see, to doubt, to search, to torture myself and make myself miserable, to pass entire days with my ear to the keyhole and the night in a flood of tears, to repeat over and over that I would die of sorrow, to feel isolation and feebleness uprooting hope in my heart, to imagine that I was spying when I was only listening to the feverish beating of my own pulse; to con over stupid phrases, such as: "Life is a dream, there is nothing stable here below;" to curse and blaspheme God through misery and through caprice: that was my joy, the precious occupation for which I renounced love, the air of heaven, and liberty!

Eternal God, liberty! Yes, there were certain moments when, in spite of all, I still thought of it. In the midst of my madness, eccentricity, and stupidity, there were within me certain impulses that at times brought me to myself. It was a breath of air which struck my face as I came from my dungeon; it was a page of a book I read when, in my bitter days, I happened to

read something besides those modern sycophants called pamphleteers, and who, out of regard for the public health, ought to be prevented from indulging in their crude philosophizing. Since I have referred to these good moments, let me mention one of them, they were so rare. One evening, I was reading the "Memoirs of Constant"; I came to the following lines:

"Salsdorf, a Saxon surgeon attached to Prince Christian, had his leg broken by a shell in the battle of Wagram. He lay almost lifeless on the dusty field. Fifteen paces distant, Amédée of Kerbourg, aide-de-camp, I have forgotten of whom, wounded in the breast by a bullet, falls to the ground vomiting blood. Salsdorf sees that if that young man is not cared for he will die of apoplexy; summoning all his powers, he painfully drags himself to the side of the wounded man, bleeds him and saves his life. Salsdorf himself died four days later from the effects of amputation."

When I read these words, I threw down my book, and melted into tears.

I do not regret those tears for they were such as I could shed only when my heart was right; I do not speak merely of Salsdorf, and do not care for that particular instance. I am sure, however, that I did not suspect any one that day. Poor dreamer! Ought I to remember that I have been other than I am? What good will

it do me as I stretch out my arms in anguish to heaven and wait for the shell that will deliver me forever. Alas! that was only a gleam that flashed across the night of my life.

Like those dervish fanatics who find ecstasy in vertigo when thought, turning on itself, exhausted by the stress of introspection, tired of vain effort, recoils in fright; thus it would seem that man must be a void and that by dint of delving within himself, he reaches the last turn of a spiral. There, as on the summits of mountains and at the bottom of mines, air fails and God forbids man to go farther. Then, struck with a mortal chill, the heart, as though impaired by oblivion, seeks to escape into a new birth; it demands life of that which environs it, it eagerly drinks in the air; but it finds round about only its own chimeras which have just animated its failing powers and which, self-created, surround it like pitiless specters.

This can not last long. Tired of uncertainty, I resolved to resort to a test that would discover the truth.

I ordered post horses for ten in the evening. We had hired a calash and I gave direction that all should be ready at the hour indicated. At the same time I asked that nothing be said to Madame Pierson. Smith came to dinner; at the table I affected unusual cheerfulness, and without a word about my plans, I turned the con-

versation to our journey. I would renounce all idea of going away, I said, if I thought Brigitte did not care to go; I was so well satisfied with Paris that I asked nothing better than to remain as long as she pleased. I made much of all the pleasures of the city; I spoke of the balls, the theaters, of the many opportunities for diversion on every hand. In short, since we were happy, I did not see why we should make a change; and I did not think of going away at present.

I was expecting her to insist that we carry out our plan of going to Geneva, and was not disappointed. However, she insisted but feebly; but, after a few words, I pretended to yield, and then changing the subject, I spoke of other things, as though it was all settled.

"And why will not Smith go with us?" I asked. "It is very true that he has duties here, but can he not obtain leave of absence? Moreover, will not the talents he possesses and which he is unwilling to use assure him an honorable living anywhere? Let him come along with us; the carriage is large and we offer him a place in it. A young man should see the world and there is nothing so irksome for a man of his age as confinement in an office and restriction to a narrow circle. Is it not true?" I asked, turning to Brigitte. "Come, my dear, let your credit obtain from him what he might refuse me; urge

him to give us six weeks of his time. We will travel together and, after a tour of Switzerland, he will return to his duties with new life."

Brigitte joined her entreaties to mine, although she knew it was only a joke on my part. Smith could not leave Paris without danger of losing his position and replied that he regretted being obliged to deny himself the pleasure of accompanying us. Nevertheless, I continued to press him, and, ordering another bottle of wine, I repeated my invitation. After dinner, I went out to assure myself that my orders were carried out; then I returned in high spirits, and seating myself at the piano, I proposed some music.

"Let us pass the evening here," I said; "believe me it is better than going to the theater; I can not take part myself, but I can listen. We will make Smith play, if he tires of our company, and the time will pass pleasantly."

Brigitte consented with good grace and began playing for us; Smith accompanied her on the violoncello. The materials for a bowl of punch were brought and the flame of burning rum soon cheered us with its light. The piano was abandoned for the table; then we had cards; everything passed off as I wished and we succeeded in diverting ourselves to my heart's content.

I had my eyes fixed on the clock and waited

impatiently for the hands to mark the hour of ten. I was tormented with anxiety, but allowed them to see nothing. Finally, the hour arrived; I heard the postilion's whip as the horses entered the court. Brigitte was seated near me; I took her by the hand and asked her if she was ready to depart. She looked at me with surprise, doubtless wondering if I was not joking. I told her that, at dinner, she had appeared so anxious to go that I had felt justified in sending for the horses and that I went out for that purpose when I left the table.

"Are you serious?" asked Brigitte; "do you wish to set out to-night?"

"Why not," I replied, "since we have agreed that we ought to leave Paris?"

"What! now? At this very moment?"

"Certainly; have we not been ready for a month? You see there is nothing to do but load our trunks on the calash; as we have decided to go, ought we not go at once? I believe it is better to go now and put off nothing until to-morrow. You are in the humor to travel to-night and I hasten to profit by it. Why wait longer and continue to put it off? I can not endure this life. You wish to go, do you not? Very well, let us go and be done with it."

Profound silence ensued. Brigitte stepped to the window and satisfied herself that the calash was there. Moreover, the tone in which I spoke

would admit of no doubt, and, however hasty my action may have appeared to her, it was due to her own expressed desire. She could not deny her own words, nor find any pretext for further delay. Her decision was made promptly; she asked a few questions, as though to assure herself that all the preparations had been made; seeing that nothing had been omitted, she began to search here and there. She found her hat and shawl, then continued her search.

"I am ready," she said; "shall we go? We are really going?"

She took a light, went to my room, to her own, opened lockers and closets. She asked for the key to her secretary which she said she had lost. Where could that key be? She had it in her possession not an hour ago.

"Come, come! I am ready," she repeated in extreme agitation; "let us go, Octave, let us set out at once."

While speaking, she continued her search and then came and sat down near us.

I was seated on the sofa watching Smith, who stood before me. He had not changed countenance and seemed neither troubled nor surprised; but two drops of sweat trickled down his forehead, and I heard an ivory counter crackle between his fingers, the pieces falling to the floor. He held out both hands to us.

"*Bon voyage*, my friends!" he said.

Again silence; I was still watching him, waiting for him to add a word. "If there is some secret here," thought I, "when shall I learn it, if not now? It must be on the lips of both of them. Let it but come out into the light and I will seize it."

"My dear Octave," said Brigitte, "where are we to stop? You will write to us, Henry, will you not? You will not forget my relatives and will do what you can for me?" He replied, in a voice that trembled slightly, that he would do all in his power to serve her.

"I can answer for nothing," he said, "and, judging from the letters you have received, there is not much hope. But it will not be my fault if I do not soon send you good news. Count on me, I am devoted to you."

After a few more kind words, he made ready to take his departure. I arose and left the room before him; I wished to leave them together a moment for the last time and, as soon as I had closed the door behind me, in a perfect rage of jealousy, I pressed my ear to the keyhole.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Never," replied Brigitte; "adieu, Henry." She held out her hand. He bent over it, pressed it to his lips and I had barely time to slip into a corner as he passed out without seeing me.

Alone with Brigitte, my heart sank within me. She was waiting for me, her shawl on her arm,

and emotion plainly marked on her face. She had found the key she had been looking for and her desk was open. I returned and sat down near the fire. "Listen to me," I said without daring to look at her; "I have been so culpable in my treatment of you that I ought to wait and suffer without a word of complaint. The change which has taken place in you has thrown me into such despair that I have not been able to refrain from asking you the cause; but to-day I ask nothing more. Does it cost you an effort to depart? Tell me, and if so, I am resigned."

"Let us go, let us go!" she replied.

"As you please, but be frank; whatever blow I may receive, I ought not to ask whence it comes; I should submit without a murmur. But if I lose you, do not speak to me of hope, for God knows I will not survive the loss."

She turned on me like a flash.

"Speak to me of your love," she said, "not of your grief."

"Very well, I love you more than life. Beside my love, my grief is but a dream. Come with me to the end of the world, I will die or I will live with you."

With these words, I advanced toward her; she turned pale and recoiled. She made a vain effort to force a smile on her contracted lips, and sitting down before her desk she said:

"One moment; I have some papers here I want to burn."

She showed me the letters from N——, tore them up and threw them into the fire; she then took out other papers which she reread and then spread out on the table. They were bills of purchases she had made and some of them were still unpaid. While examining them, she began to talk rapidly, while her cheeks burned as though with fever. Then she asked my pardon for her obstinate silence and her conduct since our arrival. She gave evidence of more tenderness, more confidence than ever. She clapped her hands gleefully at the prospect of a happy journey; in short, she was all love, or at least apparently all love. I can not tell how I suffered at the sight of that factitious joy; there was, in that grief which crazed her, something more sad than tears and more bitter than reproaches. I would have preferred to have her cold and indifferent rather than thus excited; it seemed to me a parody of our happiest moments. There were the same words, the same woman, the same caresses; and that which, fifteen days before, would have intoxicated me with love and happiness, repeated thus, filled me with horror.

"Brigitte," I suddenly inquired, "what secret are you concealing from me? If you love me, what horrible comedy is this you are playing before me?"

"I!" said she almost offended. "What makes you think I am playing?"

"What makes me think so? Tell me, my dear, that you have death in your soul and that you are suffering martyrdom. Behold my arms are ready to receive you; lean your head on me and weep. Then I will take you away, perhaps; but in truth, not thus."

"Let us go, let us go!" she again repeated.

"No, on my soul! No, not at present; no, not while there is between us a lie or a mask. I like unhappiness better than such cheerfulness as yours."

She was silent, astonished to see that I had not been deceived by her words and manner and that I saw through them both.

"Why should we delude ourselves?" I continued. "Have I fallen so low in your esteem that you can dissimulate before me? That unfortunate journey, you think you are condemned to it, do you? Am I a tyrant, an absolute master? Am I an executioner who drags you to punishment? How much do you fear my wrath when you come before me with such mimicry? What terror impels you to lie thus?"

"You are wrong," she replied; "I beg of you, not a word more."

"Why so little sincerity? If I am not your confidant, may I not, at least, be your friend? If

I am denied all knowledge of the source of your tears, may I not, at least, see them flow? Have you not enough confidence in me to believe that I will respect your sorrow? What have I done that I should be ignorant of it? Might not the remedy lay right there?"

"No," she replied, "you are wrong; you will achieve your own unhappiness as well as mine if you press me farther. Is it not enough that we are going away?"

"And do you expect me to drag you away against your will? Is it not evident that you have consented reluctantly, and that you already begin to repent? Great God! What is it you are concealing from me? What is the use playing with words when your thoughts are as clear as that glass before which you stand? Would I not be the meanest of men to accept at your hands what is yielded with so much regret? And yet how can I refuse it? What can I do if you refuse to speak?"

"No, I do not oppose you, you are mistaken; I love you, Octave; cease tormenting me thus."

She threw so much tenderness into these words that I fell down on my knees before her. Who could resist her glance and her voice?

"My God!" I cried, "you love me, Brigitte? My dear mistress, you love me?"

"Yes, I love you; yes, I belong to you; do with me what you will. I will follow you, let

us go away together; come, Octave, the carriage is waiting."

She pressed my hand in hers, and kissed my forehead.

"Yes, it must be," she murmured, "it must be."

"*It must be*," I repeated to myself. I arose.

On the table, there remained only one piece of paper that Brigitte was examining. She picked it up, then allowed it to drop to the floor.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes, that is all."

When I ordered the horses I had no idea that we would really go, I wished merely to make a trial, but circumstances bid fair to force me to carry my plans farther than I at first intended. I opened the door.

"It must be!" I said to myself. "It must be!" I repeated aloud.

"What do you mean by that, Brigitte? What is there in those words that I do not understand? Explain yourself, or I will not go. Why must you love me?"

She fell on the sofa and wrung her hands in grief.

"Ah! Unhappy man!" she cried, "you will never know how to love!"

"Yes, I think you are right, but, before God, I know how to suffer. You must love me, must you not? Very well, then you must answer me.

Were I to lose you forever, were these walls to crumble over my head, I will not leave this spot until I have solved the mystery that has been torturing me for more than a month. Speak, or I will leave you. I may be a fool who destroys his own happiness, I may be demanding something that is not for me to possess, it may be that an explanation will separate us and raise before me an insurmountable barrier, that it will render our tour, on which I have set my heart, impossible; whatever it may cost you and me, you shall speak or I will renounce everything."

"No, I will not speak."

"You will speak! Do you fondly imagine I am the dupe of your lies? When I see you change between morning and evening until you differ more from your natural self than does night from day, do you think I am deceived? When you give me, as a cause, some letters that are not worth the trouble of reading, do you imagine that I am to be put off with the first pretext that comes to hand because you do not choose to seek another? Is your face made of plaster that it is difficult to see what is passing in your heart? What is your opinion of me? I do not deceive myself as much as you suppose, and take care lest, in default of words, your silence discloses what you so obstinately conceal."

"What do you imagine I am concealing?"

"What do I imagine? You ask me that! Is it to brave me you ask such a question? Do you think to make me desperate and thus get rid of me? Yes, I admit it, offended pride is capable of driving me to extremes. If I should explain myself freely, you would have at your service all feminine hypocrisy; you hope that I will accuse you, so that you can reply that such a woman as you does not stoop to justify herself. How skilfully the most guilty and treacherous of your sex contrive to use proud disdain as a shield! Your great weapon is silence; I did not learn that yesterday. You wish to be insulted and you hold your tongue until it comes to that; come, come, struggle against my heart; where yours beats, you will find it; but do not struggle against my head, it is harder than iron, and it has served me as long as yours!"

"Poor boy!" murmured Brigitte; "you do not want to go?"

"No, I shall not go except with my mistress and you are not that now. I have struggled, I have suffered, I have eaten my own heart long enough. It is time for day to break, I have loved long enough in the night. Yes or no, will you answer me?"

"No."

"As you please; I will wait."

I sat down on the other side of the room de-

termined not to rise until I had learned what I wished to know. She appeared to be reflecting and walked back and forth before me.

I followed her with an eager eye, while her silence gradually increased my anger. I was unwilling to have her perceive it and was undecided what to do. I opened the window.

"You may drive off," I called to those below, "and I will see that you are paid. I shall not start to-night."

"Poor boy!" repeated Brigitte. I quietly closed the window and sat down as though I had not heard her; but I was so furious with rage that I could hardly restrain myself. That cold silence, that negative force, exasperated me to the last point. Had I been really deceived and convinced of the guilt of the woman I loved, I could not have suffered more. As I had condemned myself to remain in Paris, I reflected that I must compel Brigitte to speak at any price. In vain, I tried to think of some means of forcing her to enlighten me; for such power, I would have given all I possessed. What could I do or say? She sat there calm and unruffled looking at me with sadness. I heard the sound of the horses' hoofs on the pavement as the carriage drew out of the court. I had merely to turn my hand to call them back, but it seemed to me that there was something irrevocable about their departure. I slipped the bolt on the door;

something whispered in my ear: "You are face to face with the woman who must give you life or death."

While thus buried in thought, I tried to invent some expedient that would lead to the truth, I recalled one of Diderot's romances in which a woman, jealous of her lover, resorted to a novel plan, for the purpose of clearing away her doubts. She told him that she no longer loved him and that she wished to leave him. The Marquis des Arcis, the name of the lover, falls into the trap, and confesses that he, himself, has tired of the liaison. That piece of strategy, which I had read at too early an age, had struck me as being very skilful and the recollection of it at this moment made me smile. "Who knows?" said I to myself, "if I should try this with Brigitte, she might be deceived and tell me her secret."

My anger had become furious when the idea of resorting to such trickery occurred to me. Was it so difficult to make a woman speak in spite of herself? This woman was my mistress; I must be very weak if I could not gain my point. I turned over on the sofa with an air of indifference.

"Very well, my dear," said I gaily, "this is not a time for confidences then?"

She looked at me in astonishment.

"And yet," I continued, "we must some day

come to the truth. Now I believe it would be well to begin at once; that will make you confiding, and there is nothing like an understanding between friends."

Doubtless, my face betrayed me as I spoke these words; Brigitte did not appear to understand and kept on walking up and down.

"Do you know," I resumed, "that we have been together now six months. The life we are leading together is not one to be laughed at. You are young, I also; if this kind of life should become distasteful to you, are you the woman to tell me of it? In truth, if it were so, I would confess it to you frankly. And why not? Is it a crime to love? If not, it is not a crime to love less or to cease to love at all. Would it be astonishing if, at our age, we should feel the need of change?"

She stopped me.

"At our age!" said she. "Are you addressing me? What comedy are you now playing yourself?"

Blood mounted to my face. I seized her hand. "Sit down here," I said, "and listen to me."

"What is the use? It is not you who speak."

I felt ashamed of my own strategy and abandoned it.

"Listen to me," I repeated, "and come, I beg of you, sit down near me. If you wish to re-

main silent yourself, at least hear what I have to say."

"I am listening, what have you to say to me?"

"If some one should say to me: 'You are a coward!' I, who am twenty-two years of age and have fought on the field of honor, would throw the taunt back in the teeth of my accuser. Have I not within me the consciousness of what I am? It would be necessary for me to meet my accuser on the field, and play my life against his; why? In order to prove that I am not a coward; otherwise, the world would believe it. That single word demands that reply every time it is spoken, and it matters not by whom."

"It is true; what is your meaning?"

"Women do not fight; but as society is constituted there is no being, of whatever sex, who ought to submit to the indignity involved in an aspersion on all his or her past life, be that life regulated as by a pendulum. Reflect; who escapes that law? There are some, I admit; but what happens? If it is a man, dishonor; if it is a woman, what? Forgiveness. Every one who lives ought to give some evidence of life, some proof of existence. There is, then, for woman as well as for man, a time when an attack must be resented. If she is brave, she rises, announces that she is present, and sits down again. A stroke of the sword is not for her. She must not only

avenge herself, but she must make her own weapons. Some one suspects her; who? An outsider? She may hold him in contempt. Her lover whom she loves? If so, it is her life that is in question, and she may not despise him."

"Her only recourse is silence."

"You are wrong, the lover who suspects her casts an aspersion on her entire life, I know it; her plea is her tears, her past life, her devotion and her patience. What will happen if she remains silent? Her lover will lose her by her own act and time will justify her. Is not that your thought?"

"Perhaps; silence before all."

"Perhaps, you say? Assuredly I will lose you if you do not speak; my resolution is made: I am going away alone."

"But, Octave——"

"But," I cried, "time will justify you! Let us put an end to it; yes or no?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"You hope so! Will you answer me definitely? This is, doubtless, the last time you will have the opportunity. You tell me that you love me, and I believe it. I suspect you; is it your intention to allow me to go away and rely on time to justify you?"

"Of what do you suspect me?"

"I do not choose to say, for I see that it would be useless. But, after all, misery for misery,

at your leisure; I am as well pleased. You deceive me, you love another; that is your secret and mine."

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Smith."

She placed her hand on her lips and turned aside. I could say no more; we were both pensive, our eyes fixed on the floor.

"Listen to me," she began with an effort. "I have suffered much, I call to heaven to bear me witness that I would give my life for you. So long as the faintest gleam of hope remains, I am ready to suffer anything; but, although I may rouse your anger in saying to you that I am a woman, I am, nevertheless, a woman, my friend. We can not go beyond the limits of human endurance. Beyond a certain point I will not answer for the consequences. All I can do at this moment is to get down on my knees before you and beseech you not to go away."

She knelt down as she spoke. I arose.

"Fool that I am!" I muttered bitterly, "fool to try to get the truth from a woman! He who undertakes such a task will earn naught but derision and will deserve it! Truth! Only he who sorts with chamber-maids knows it, only he who steals to their pillow and listens to the unconscious utterance of a dream, hears it. He alone knows it, who makes a woman of himself

and initiates himself into the secrets of her cult of inconstancy! But the man who asks for it openly, he who opens a loyal hand to receive that frightful alms, he will never obtain it! They are on guard with him; for reply, he receives a shrug of the shoulders, and, if he rouses himself in his impatience, they rise in righteous indignation like an outraged vestal, while there falls from their lips the great feminine oracle that suspicion destroys love, and they refuse to pardon an accusation which they are unable to meet. Ah! just God! How weary I am! When will all this cease?"

"Whenever you please," said she coldly, "I am as tired of it as you."

"At this very moment; I leave you forever, and may time justify you! Time! Time! O! what a cold lover! remember this adieu. Time! and thy beauty, and thy love, and thy happiness, where will they be? Is it thus, without regret, you allow me to go? Ah! the day when the jealous lover will know that he has been unjust, the day when he shall see proofs, he will understand what a heart he has wounded, is it not so? He will bewail his shame, he will know neither joy nor sleep; he will live only in the memory of the time when he might have been happy. But, on that day, his proud mistress will turn pale as she sees herself avenged; she will say to herself: 'If I had only done it sooner!'

And believe me, if she loves him, pride will not console her."

I tried to be calm but I was no longer master of myself, and I began to pace the floor as she had done. There are certain glances that resemble the clashing of drawn swords; such glances, Brigitte and I exchanged at that moment. I looked at her as the prisoner looks at the door of his dungeon. In order to break the seal on her lips and force her to speak, I would give my life and hers.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What do you wish me to tell you?"

"What you have in your heart. Are you cruel enough to make me repeat it?"

"And you, you," she cried, "are you not a hundred times more cruel? Ah! fool, as you say, who would know the truth! Fool that I would be if I expected you to believe it! You would know my secret, and my secret is that I love you. Fool that I am! you will seek another. That pallor of which you are the cause, you accuse it, you question it. Like a fool, I have tried to suffer in silence, to consecrate to you my resignation; I have tried to conceal my tears; you have played the spy, and you have counted them as witnesses against me. Fool that I am! I have thought of crossing seas, of exiling myself from France with you, of dying far from all who have loved me, leaning for sole support

on a heart that doubts me. Fool that I am! I thought that truth had a glance, an accent, that could not be mistaken, that would be respected! Ah! when I think of it, tears choke me. Why, if it must ever be thus, induce me to take a step that will forever destroy my peace? My head is confused, I do not know where I am!"

She leaned on me weeping.

"Fool! Fool!" she repeated, in a heart-rending voice.

"And what is it you ask?" she continued. "What can I do to meet those suspicions that are ever born anew, that alter with your moods? I must justify myself, you say! For what? For loving, for dying, for despairing? And if I assume a forced cheerfulness, even that cheerfulness offends you. I sacrifice everything to follow you and you have not gone a league before you look back. Always, everywhere, whatever I may do, insults and angers! Ah! dear child, if you knew what a mortal chill comes over me, what suffering I endure in seeing my simplest words thus taken up and hurled back at me with suspicion and sarcasm! By that course, you deprive yourself of the only happiness there is in the world—perfect love. You kill all delicate and lofty sentiment in the hearts of those who love you; soon you will believe in nothing except the material and the gross; of love, there will remain for you only that which is visible and can

be touched with the finger. You are young, Octave, and you have still a long life before you; you will have other mistresses. Yes, as you say, pride is a little thing and it is not to it I look for consolation; but God wills that one of your tears shall one day pay me for those which I now shed for you!"

She arose.

"Must it be said? Must you know that for six months I have not sought repose without repeating to myself that it was all in vain, that you would never be cured; that I have never risen in the morning without saying that another effort must be made; that after every word you have spoken I have felt that I ought to leave you, and that you have not given me a caress that I would rather die than endure; that, day by day, minute by minute, hesitating between hope and fear, I have vainly tried to conquer either my love or my grief; that, when I opened my heart to you, you pierced it with a mocking glance, and that, when I closed it, it seemed to me I felt within it a treasure that none but you could dispense? Shall I speak of all the frailty and all the mysteries which seem puerile to those who do not respect them? Shall I tell you that when you left me in anger I shut myself up to read your first letters; that there is a favorite waltz that I never played in vain when I felt too keenly the suffering caused by your presence?

Ah! wretch that I am! How dearly all these unnumbered tears, all these follies so sweet to the feeble, are purchased! Weep now; not even this punishment, this sorrow, will avail you."

I tried to interrupt her.

"Allow me to continue," she said, "the time has come when I must speak. Let us see, why do you doubt me? For six months, in thought, in body, and in soul, I have belonged to no one but you. Of what do you dare suspect me? Do you wish to set out for Switzerland? I am ready, as you see. Do you think you have a rival? Send him a letter that I will sign and you will direct. What are we doing? Where are we going? Let us decide. Are we not always together? Very well, then why would you leave me? I can not be near you and separated from you at the same moment. It is necessary to have confidence in those we love. Love is either good or bad: if good, we must believe in it; if evil, we must cure ourselves of it. All this, you see, is a game we are playing; but our hearts and our lives are the stakes, and it is horrible! Do you wish to die? That would, perhaps, be better. Who am I that you should doubt me?"

She stopped before the glass.

"Who am I?" she repeated, "who am I? Think of it. Look at this face of mine."

"Doubt thee!" she cried, addressing her own image; "poor, pale face, thou art suspected! poor thin cheeks, poor tired eyes, thou and thy tears are in disgrace. Very well, put an end to thy suffering; let those kisses that have wasted thee, close thy lids! Descend into the cold earth, poor trembling body that can no longer support its own weight. When thou art there, perchance thou wilt be believed, if doubt believes in death. O sorrowful specter! On the banks of what stream wilt thou wander and groan? What fires devour thee? Thou dreamest of a long journey and thou hast one foot in the grave! Die! God is thy witness that thou hast tried to love. Ah! what wealth of love has been awakened in thy heart! Ah! what dreams thou hast had, what poisons thou hast drunk! What evil hast thou committed that there should be placed in thy breast a fever that consumes? What fury animates that blind creature who pushes thee into the grave with his foot, while his lips speak to thee of love? What will become of thee if thou livest! Is it not time? Is it not enough? What proof canst thou give that will satisfy when thou, poor living proof, art not believed? To what torture canst thou submit that thou hast not already endured? By what torments, what sacrifices, wilt thou appease insatiable love? Thou wilt be only an object of ridicule, a thing to excite laughter; thou wilt vainly seek a deserted

street to avoid the finger of scorn. Thou wilt lose all shame and even that appearance of virtue which has been so dear to thee; and the man, for whom thou hast disgraced thyself, will be the first to punish thee. He will reproach thee for living for him alone, for braving the world for him, and while thy own friends are whispering about thee, he will listen to assure himself that no word of pity is spoken; he will accuse thee of deceiving him if another hand even then presses thine, and if, in the desert of thy life, thou findest some one who can spare thee a word of pity in passing. O God! dost thou remember a day when a wreath of roses was placed on my head? Was it this brow on which that crown rested? Ah! the hand that hung it on the wall of the oratory has now fallen, like it, to dust! O my valley! O my old aunt, who now sleeps in peace! O my lindens, my little white goat, my dear peasants who loved me so much! You remember when I was happy, proud, and respected? Who threw in my path that stranger who took me away from all this? Who gave him the right to enter my life? Ah! wretch! why didst thou turn the first day he followed you? Why didst thou receive him as a brother? Why didst thou open thy door, and why didst thou hold out thy hand? Octave, Octave, why have you loved me if all is to end thus!"

She was about to faint as I led her to a chair

where she sank down and her head fell on my shoulder. The terrible effort she had made in speaking to me so bitterly had broken her down. Instead of an outraged woman, I found now only a suffering child. Her eyes closed and she was motionless.

When she regained consciousness, she complained of extreme languor, and begged to be left alone that she might rest. She could hardly walk; I carried her gently to her room and placed her on the bed. There was no mark of suffering on her face: she was resting from her sorrow as from great fatigue and seemed not even to remember it. Her feeble and delicate body yielded without a struggle; the strain had been too great. She held my hand in hers; I kissed her; our lips met in loving union, and after the cruel scene through which she had passed, she slept smiling on my heart as on the first day.

CHAPTER VI

Brigitte slept. Silent, motionless, I sat near her. As a farmer, when the storm has passed, counts the sheaves that remain in his devastated field, thus I began to estimate the evil I had done.

The more I thought of it, the more irrepara-

ble I felt it to be. Certain sorrows, by their very excess, warn us of their limits, and the more shame and remorse I experienced, the more I felt that, after such a scene, nothing remained for us to do but to say adieu. Whatever courage Brigitte had shown, she had drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of her sad love: unless I wished to see her die, I must give her repose. She had often addressed cruel reproaches to me and had, perhaps, on certain other occasions shown more anger than in this scene; but what she had said this time was not dictated by offended pride; it was the truth, which, hidden closely in her heart, had broken it in escaping. Our present relations, and the fact that I had refused to go away with her, destroyed all hope; she desired to pardon me but she had not the power. This slumber even, this deathlike sleep of one who could suffer no more, was conclusive evidence; this sudden silence, the tenderness she had shown in the final moments, that pale face, and that kiss, confirmed me in the belief that all was over, and that I had broken, forever, whatever bond had united us. As surely as she slept now, as soon as I gave her cause for further suffering, she would sleep in eternal rest. The clock struck and I felt that the last hour had carried away my life with hers.

Unwilling to call any one, I lighted Brigitte's lamp; I watched its feeble flame and my thoughts

seemed to flicker in the darkness like its uncertain rays.

Whatever I had said or done, the idea of losing Brigitte had never occurred to me up to this time. A hundred times I wished to leave her, but who has loved, and is ready to say just what is in his heart? That was in times of despair or of anger. So long as I knew that she loved me, I was sure of loving her; stern necessity had just arisen between us for the first time. I experienced a dull languor and could distinguish nothing clearly. What my mind understood, my soul recoiled from accepting. "Come," I said to myself, "I have desired it, and I have done it; there is not the slightest hope that we can live together; I am unwilling to kill this woman, so I have no alternative but to leave her. It is all over; I shall go away to-morrow."

And all the while I was thinking neither of my responsibility, nor of the past, nor future; I thought neither of Smith nor his connection with the affair; I could not say who had led me there, or what I had done during the last hour. I looked at the walls of the room and thought that all I had to do was to wait until to-morrow and decide what carriage I would take.

I remained for a long time in this strange calm. Just as the man who receives a thrust from a poignard feels, at first only the cold steel;

when he has gone some distance on his way he becomes weak, his eyes start from their sockets and he asks what has happened. But drop by drop the blood flows, the ground under his feet becomes red; death comes; the man, at his approach, shudders with horror and falls as though struck by a thunderbolt. Thus, apparently calm, I awaited the coming of misfortune; I repeated in a low voice what Brigitte had said, and I placed near her all that I supposed she would need for the night; I looked at her, and then went to the window and pressed my forehead against the pane, peering out at a somber and lowering sky; then I returned to the bedside. That I was going away to-morrow was the only thought in my mind and, little by little, the word "depart" became intelligible to me. "Ah! God!" I suddenly cried, "my poor mistress, I am going to lose you and I have not known how to love you!"

I trembled at these words as though it had been another who had pronounced them; they resounded through all my being as resounds the string of the harp that has been plucked to the point of breaking. In an instant two years of suffering traversed my heart, and after them, as their consequence and as their last expression, the present seized me. How shall I describe such woe? By a single word, perhaps, for those who have loved. I had taken Brigitte's hand,

and, in a dream, doubtless, she had pronounced my name.

I arose, and went to my room; a torrent of tears flowed from my eyes. I held out my arms as though to seize the past which was escaping me. "Is it possible," I repeated, "that I am going to lose you? I can love no one but you. What! you are going away? And forever? What! you, my life, my adored mistress, you flee from me; I shall never see you again? Never! never!" I said aloud; and, addressing myself to the sleeping Brigitte as though she could hear me, I added: "Never, never; do not think of it; I will never consent to it. And why so much pride? Are there no means of atoning for the offense I have committed? I beg of you let us seek some expiation. Have you not pardoned me a thousand times? But you love me, you will not be able to go, for courage will fail you. What shall we do?"

A horrible madness seized me; I began to run here and there in search of some instrument of death. At last I fell on my knees and beat my head against the bed. Brigitte stirred and I remained quiet, fearing I would waken her.

"Let her sleep until to-morrow," I said to myself; "you have all night to watch her."

I resumed my place; I was so frightened at the idea of waking Brigitte, that I scarcely dared breathe. Gradually I became more calm and

less bitter tears began to course gently down my cheeks. Tenderness succeeded fury. I leaned over Brigitte and looked at her as though, for the last time, my good angel was urging me to grave on my soul the lines of that dear face!

How pale she was! Her large eyes, surrounded by a bluish circle, were moist with tears; her form, once so lithe, was bent as though under a burden; her cheek, wasted and leaden, rested on a hand that was spare and feeble; her brow seemed to bear the marks of that crown of thorns which is the diadem of resignation. I thought of the cottage. How young she was six months ago! How cheerful, how free, how careless! What had I done with all that? It seemed to me that a strange voice repeated an old romance that I had long since forgotten:

> Altra volta gieri biele,
> Blanch' e rossa com' un flore,
> Ma ora no. Non son più biele
> Consumatis dal' amore.

My sorrow was too great; I sprang to my feet and once more began to walk the floor. "Yes," I continued, "look at her; think of those who are consumed by a grief that is not shared with another. The evils you endure, others have suffered, and nothing is singular or peculiar to you. Think of those who have no mother, no relatives, no friends; of those who seek and do not find,

of those who love in vain, of those who die and are forgotten. Before thee, there on that bed, lies a being that nature, perchance, formed for thee. From the highest circles of intelligence to the deepest and most impenetrable mysteries of matter and of form, that soul and that body are thy brothers; for six months thy mouth has not spoken, thy heart has not throbbed, without a responsive word and heart-beat from her; and that woman whom God has sent thee as He sends the rose to the field, is about to glide from thy heart. While rejoicing in each other's presence, and the angels of eternal love were singing before you, you were farther apart than two exiles at either end of the earth. Look at her, but be silent. Thou hast still one night to see her, if thy sobs do not awaken her."

Little by little, my thoughts mounted and became more somber until I recoiled in terror.

"To do evil! Such was the rôle imposed upon me by Providence! I, to do evil! I, to whom my conscience, even in the midst of my wildest follies, said that I was good! I, whom a pitiless destiny was dragging swiftly toward the abyss and whom a secret horror unceasingly warned of the awful fate to come! I, who, if I had shed blood with these hands, could yet repeat that my heart was not guilty; that I was deceived, that it was not I who did it, but my destiny, my evil genius, some unknown being

who dwelt within me, but who was not born there! I, do evil! For six months I had been engaged in that task, not a day had passed that I had not worked at that impious occupation, and I had at that moment the proof before my eyes. The man who had loved Brigitte, who had offended her, then insulted her, then abandoned her, only to take her back again, trembling with fear, beset with suspicion, finally thrown on that bed of sorrow, where she now lay extended, was I!"

I beat my breast, and, although looking at her, I could not believe it. I touched her as though to assure myself that it was not a dream. My face, as I saw it in the glass, regarded me with astonishment. Who was that creature who appeared before me bearing my features? Who was that pitiless man who blasphemed with my mouth and tortured with my hands? Was it he whom my mother called Octave? Was it he who, at fifteen, leaning over the crystal waters of a fountain, had a heart not less pure than they? I closed my eyes and thought of my childhood days. As a ray of light pierces a cloud, a gleam from the past pierced my heart.

"No," I mused, "I did not do that. These things are but an absurd dream."

I recalled the time when I was ignorant of life, when I was taking my first steps in experience. I remembered an old beggar who used

to sit on a stone bench before the farm gate, to whom I was sometimes sent with the remains of our morning meal. Holding out his feeble, wrinkled hands he would bless me as he smiled upon me. I felt the morning wind blowing on my brow and a freshness as of the rose descending from heaven into my soul. Then I opened my eyes and, by the light of the lamp, saw the reality before me.

"And you do not believe yourself guilty?" I demanded with horror. "O novice of yesterday, how corrupt to-day! Because you weep, you fondly imagine yourself innocent? What you consider the evidence of your conscience is only remorse; and what murderer does not experience it? If your virtue cries out, is it not because it feels the approach of death? O wretch! those far off voices that you hear groaning in your heart, do you think they are sobs? They are, perhaps, only the cry of the sea-mew, that funereal bird of the tempest, whose presence portends shipwreck. Who has ever told the story of the childhood of those who have died stained with human blood? They, also, have been good in their day; they sometimes bury their faces in their hands and think of those happy days. You do evil, and you repent? Nero did the same when he killed his mother. Who has told you that tears can wash away the stains of guilt?

"And even if it were true that a part of your soul is not devoted to evil forever, what will you do with the other part that is not yours? You will touch with your left hand the wounds that you inflict with your right; you will make a shroud of your virtue in which to bury your crimes; you will strike, and, like Brutus, you will engrave on your sword the prattle of Plato! Into the heart of the being who opens her arms to you, you will plunge that blood-stained but repentant arm; you will follow to the cemetery the victim of your passion, and you will plant on her grave the sterile flower of your pity; you will say to those who see you: 'What would you expect? I have learned how to kill, and observe that I already weep; learn that God made me better than you see me.' You will speak of your youth and you will persuade yourself that Heaven ought to pardon you, that your misfortunes are involuntary and you will implore sleepless nights to grant you a little repose.

"But who knows? You are still young. The more you trust in your heart, the farther astray you will be lead by your pride. To-day you stand before the first ruin you are going to leave on your route. If Brigitte dies to-morrow you will weep on her tomb; where will you go when you leave her? You will go away for three months perhaps, and you will travel in

Italy; you will wrap your cloak about you, like a splenetic Englishman, and you will say some beautiful morning, sitting in your inn with your glasses before you, that it is time to forget in order to live again. You who weep too late, take care lest you weep more than one day. Who knows? When the present, which makes you shudder, shall have become the past, an old story, a confused memory, may it not happen some night of debauchery that you will overturn your chair and recount, with a smile on your lips, what you witnessed with tears in your eyes? It is thus that one drinks away shame. You have begun by being good, you will become weak, and you will become a monster.

"My poor friend," said I, from the bottom of my heart, "I have a word of advice for you, and it is this: I believe that you must die. While there is still some virtue left, profit by it in order that you may not become altogether bad; while a woman you love lies there dying on that bed, and while you have a horror of yourself, strike the decisive blow; she still lives; that is enough; do not attend her funeral obsequies for fear that on the morrow you will not be consoled; turn the poignard against your own heart while that heart yet loves the God who made it. Is it your youth that makes you pause? And would you spare those youthful locks? Never allow them to whiten if they are not white to-night.

"And then what would you do in the world? If you go away, where will you go? What can you hope for if you remain? Ah! in looking at that woman you seem to have a treasure buried in your heart. It is not merely that you lose her, it is less what has been than what might have been. When the hands of the clock indicated such and such an hour, you might have been happy. If you suffer, why do you not open your heart? If you love, why do you not say so? Why do you die of hunger clasping a priceless treasure in your hands? You have closed the door, you miser; you debate with yourself behind locks and bolts. Shake them, for it was your hand that forged them. O fool! who have desired, and have possessed your desire, you have not thought of God! You play with happiness as a child plays with a rattle, and you do not reflect how rare and fragile a thing you hold in your hands; you treat it with disdain, you smile at it and you continue to amuse yourself with it, forgetting how many prayers it has cost your good angel to preserve for you that shadow of daylight! Ah! if there is in heaven one who watches over you, what is he doing at this moment? He is seated before an organ; his wings are half folded, his hands extended over the ivory keys; he begins an eternal hymn; the hymn of love and immortal rest, but his wings droop, his head falls over the keys; the angel of death has

touched him on the shoulder, he disappears into immensity!

"And you, at the age of twenty-two when a noble and exalted passion, when the strength of youth might perhaps have made something of you! When after so many sorrows and bitter disappointments, a youth so dissipated, you saw a better time shining in the future; when your life, consecrated to the object of your adoration, gave promise of new strength, at that moment the abyss yawns before you! You no longer experience vague desires, but real regrets; your heart is no longer hungry, it is broken! And you hesitate? What do you expect? Since she no longer cares for your life, it counts for nothing! Since she abandons you, abandon yourself! Let those who have loved you in your youth weep for you! They are not many. If you would live, you must not only forget love but you must deny that it exists; not only deny what there has been of good in you, but kill all that may be good in the future; for what will you do if you remember? Life for you would be one ceaseless regret. No, no, you must choose between your soul and your body; you must kill one or the other. The memory of the good drives you to the evil; make a corpse of yourself unless you wish to become your own specter. O child, child! die while you can! May tears be shed over thy grave!"

I threw myself on the foot of the bed in such a frightful state of despair, that my reason fled and I no longer knew where I was or what I was doing. Brigitte sighed.

My senses stirred within me. Was it grief or despair? I do not know. Suddenly a horrible idea occurred to me.

"What!" I muttered, "leave that for another! Die, descend into the ground, while that bosom heaves with the air of heaven? Just God! another hand than mine on that fine, transparent skin! Another mouth on those lips, another love in that heart! Brigitte happy, loving, adored, and I in a corner of the cemetery, crumbling into dust in a ditch! How long will it take her to forget me if I cease to exist to-morrow? How many tears will she shed? None, perhaps! Not a friend who speaks to her but will say that my death was a good thing. Who will not hasten to console her, who will not urge her to forget me! If she weeps, they will seek to distract her attention from her loss; if memory haunts her, they will take her away; if her love for me survives me, they will seek to cure her as though she had been poisoned; and she herself, who will perhaps at first say that she desires to follow me, will a month later turn aside to avoid the weeping-willow planted over my grave! How could it be otherwise? Who as beautiful as she wastes life in idle regrets? If

she should think of dying of grief that beautiful bosom would urge her to live, and her glass would persuade her; and the day when her exhausted tears give place to the first smile, who will not congratulate her on her recovery? When, after eight days of silence, she consents to hear my name pronounced in her presence, then she will speak of it herself as though to say: 'Console me;' then little by little she will no longer refuse to think of the past but will speak of it, and she will open her window some beautiful spring morning when the birds are singing in the garden; she will become pensive and say: 'I have loved!' Who will be there at her side? Who will dare to tell her that she must continue to love? Ah! then I will be no more! You will listen to him, faithless one! You will blush as does the budding rose and the blood of youth will mount to your face. While saying that your heart is sealed, you will allow it to escape through that fresh aureole of beauty, each ray of which allures a kiss. How much they desire to be loved who say they love no more! And why should that astonish you? You are a woman; that body, that spotless bosom, you know what they are worth; when you conceal them under your dress you do not believe, as do the virgins, that all are alike, and you know the price of your modesty. How can the woman who has been praised resolve to be praised no more? Does

she think she is living when she remains in the shadow and there is silence round about her beauty? Her beauty itself is the admiring glance of her lover. No, no, there can be no doubt of it; who has loved, can not live without love; who has seen death, clings to life. Brigitte loves me and will perhaps die of love; I will kill myself and another will have her."

"Another, another!" I repeated, bending over her until my head touched her shoulder. "Is she not a widow? Has she not already seen death? Have not these little hands prepared the dead for burial? Her tears for the second will not flow as long as those shed for the first. Ah! God forgive me! While she sleeps why should I not kill her? If I should awaken her now and tell her that her hour had come and that we were going to die with a last kiss, she would consent. What does it matter? Is it certain that all does not end with that?"

I found a knife on the table and I picked it up.

"Fear, cowardice, superstition! What do they know about it who talk of something else beyond? It is for the ignorant, common people that a future life has been invented, but who really believes in it? What watcher in the cemetery has seen Death leave his tomb and hold consultation with a priest? In olden times there were fantoms; they are interdicted by the police

in civilized cities and no cries are now heard issuing from the earth except from those buried in haste. Who has silenced death if it has ever spoken? Because funeral processions are no longer permitted to encumber our streets, does the celestial spirit languish? To die, that is the final purpose, the end. God has established it, man discusses it; but over every door is written: 'Do what thou wilt, thou shalt die.' What will be said if I kill Brigitte? Neither of us will hear. In to-morrow's journal would appear the intelligence that Octave de T—— had killed his mistress, and the day after no one would speak of it. Who would follow us to the grave? No one who, upon returning to his home, could not enjoy a hearty dinner; and when we were extended side by side in our narrow bed, the world could walk over our graves without disturbing us. Is it not true, my well-beloved, is it not true that it would be well with us? It is a soft bed, that bed of earth; no suffering can reach us there; the occupants of the neighboring tombs will not gossip about us; our bones will embrace in peace and without pride, for death is solace, and that which binds does not also separate. Why should annihilation frighten thee, poor body, destined to corruption? Every hour that strikes drags thee on to thy doom, every step breaks the round on which thou hast just rested; thou art nourished by the dead; the air of heaven weighs

upon and crushes thee, the earth on which thou treadest attacks thee by the soles of thy feet. Down with thee! Why art thou affrighted? Dost thou tremble at a word? Merely say: 'We will not live.' Is not life a burden that we long to lay down? Why hesitate when it is merely a question of a little sooner or a little later? Matter is indestructible, and the physicists, we are told, grind to infinity the smallest speck of dust without being able to annihilate it. If matter is the property of chance, what harm can it do to change its form since it can not cease to be matter? Why should God care what form I have received and with what livery I invest my grief? Suffering lives in my brain; it belongs to me, I kill it; but my bones do not belong to me and I return them to Him who lent them to me: may some poet make a cup of my skull from which to drink his new wine! What reproach can I incur and what harm can that reproach do me? What stern judge will tell me that I have done wrong? What does he know about it? Was he such as I? If every creature has his task to perform and if it is a crime to shirk it, what culprits are the babes who die on the nurse's breast! Why should they be spared? Who will be instructed by the lessons which are taught after death? Must heaven be a desert in order that man may be punished for having lived? Is it not enough to have lived?

I do not know who asked that question, unless it was Voltaire on his death-bed; it is a cry of despair worthy of a helpless old atheist. But to what purpose? Why so many struggles? Who is there above us who delights in so much agony? Who amuses himself and whiles away an idle hour watching this spectacle of creation, always renewed and always dying, seeing the work of man's hands rising, the grass growing; looking upon the planting of the seed and the fall of the thunderbolt; beholding man walking about upon his earth until he meets the beckoning finger of death; counting tears and watching them dry upon the cheek of pain; noting the pure profile of love and the wrinkled face of age; seeing hands stretched up to him in supplication, bodies prostrate before him, and not a blade of wheat more in the harvest! Who is it then who has made so much for the pleasure of knowing that it all amounts to nothing! The earth is dying; Herschell says it is of cold; who holds in his hand the drop of condensed vapor and watches it as it dries up, as an angler watches a grain of sand in his hand? That mighty law of attraction that suspends the world in space, torments it and consumes it in endless desire; every planet carries its load of misery and groans on its axle; they call to each other across the abyss and each wonders which will stop first. God controls them; they accomplish assiduously

and eternally their appointed and useless task; they whirl about, they suffer, they burn, they become extinct and they light up with new flame; they descend and they reascend, they follow and yet they avoid each other, they interlace like rings; they carry on their surface thousands of beings who are ceaselessly renewed; the beings move about, cross each other's paths, clasp each other for an hour, and then fall and others rise in their place; where life fails, life hastens to the spot; where air is wanting, air rushes; no disorder, everything is regulated, marked out, written down in lines of gold and parables of fire, everything keeps step with the celestial music along the pitiless paths of life; and all for nothing! And we, poor nameless dreams, pale and sorrowful apparitions, helpless ephemera, we who are animated by the breath of a second, in order that death may exist, we exhaust ourselves with fatigue in order to prove that we are living for a purpose, and that something indefinable is stirring within us. We hesitate to turn against our breasts a little piece of steel, or blow out our brains with a little instrument no larger than our hand; it seems to us that chaos would return again; we have written and revised the laws both human and divine and we are afraid of our catechisms; we suffer thirty years without murmuring and imagine that we are struggling; finally suffering becomes the

stronger, we send a pinch of powder into the sanctuary of intelligence, and a flower pierces the soil above our grave."

As I finished these words I directed the knife I held in my hand against Brigitte's bosom. I was no longer master of myself, and in my delirious condition I know not what might have happened; I threw back the bedclothing to uncover the heart, when I discovered on her white bosom a little ebony crucifix.

I recoiled, seized with sudden fear; my hand relaxed, my weapon fell to the floor. It was Brigitte's aunt who had given her that little crucifix on her death-bed. I did not remember ever having seen it before; doubtless, at the moment of setting out she had suspended it about her neck as a preserving charm against the dangers of the journey. Suddenly I joined my hands and knelt on the floor.

"O, Lord my God," I said in trembling tones, "Lord, my God, thou art there!"

Let those who do not believe in Christ read this page; I no longer disbelieved in him. Neither as a child, nor at school, nor as a man, have I frequented churches; my religion, if I had any, had neither rite nor symbol, and I believed in a God without form, without a cult, and without revelation. Poisoned, from youth, by all the writings of the last century, I had sucked, at an early hour, the sterile milk of impiety. Hu-

man pride, that God of the egoist, closed my mouth against prayer, while my affrighted soul took refuge in the hope of nothingness. I was as though drunken or insensate when I saw that effigy of Christ on Brigitte's bosom; while not believing in him myself I recoiled, knowing that she believed in him. It was not vain terror that arrested my hand. Who saw me? I was alone and it was night. Was it prejudice? What prevented me from hurling out of my sight that little piece of black wood? I could have thrown it into the fire, but it was my weapon I threw there. Ah! what an experience that was, and still is, for my soul! What miserable wretches are men who mock at that which can save a human being! What matters the name, the form, the belief? Is not all that is good sacred? How dare any one touch God?

As at a glance from the sun the snows descend the mountains and the glaciers that threatened heaven melt into streams in the valley, so there descended into my heart a stream that overflowed its banks. Repentance is a pure incense; it exhaled from all my suffering. Although I had almost committed a crime when my hand was arrested, I felt that my heart was innocent. In an instant calm, self-possession, reason returned; I again approached the bed; I leaned over my idol and kissed the crucifix.

"Sleep in peace," I said to her, "God watches

over you! While your lips were parting in a smile, you were in greater danger than you have ever known before. But the hand that threatened you will harm no one; I swear by the faith you profess, I will not kill either you or myself! I am a fool, a madman, a child who thinks himself a man. God be praised! You are young and beautiful. You live and you will forget me. You will recover from the evil I have done you, if you can forgive me. Sleep in peace until day, Brigitte, and then decide our fate; whatever sentence you pronounce, I will submit without complaint. And thou, Lord, who hast saved me, grant me pardon. I was born in an impious century, and I have many crimes to expiate. Thou Son of God, whom men forget, I have not been taught to love Thee. I have never worshiped in Thy temples, but I thank heaven that where I find Thee, I tremble and bow in reverence. I have at least kissed with my lips a heart that is full of Thee. Protect that heart so long as life lasts; dwell within it, Thou Holy One; a poor unfortunate has been brave enough to defy death at the sight of Thy suffering and Thy death; though impious, Thou hast saved him from evil; if he had believed, Thou wouldst have consoled him. Pardon those who have made him incredulous since Thou hast made him repentant; pardon those who blaspheme! When they were in despair they did not see Thee! Human joys

are a mockery; they are scornful and pitiless; O Lord! the happy of this world think they have no need of Thee! Pardon them. Although their pride may outrage Thee, they will be, sooner or later, baptized in tears; grant that they may cease to believe in any other shelter from the tempest, than Thy love, and spare them the severe lessons of unhappiness. Our wisdom and skepticism are in our hands but children's toys; forgive us for dreaming that we can defy Thee, Thou who smilest at Golgotha. The worst result of all our vain misery is that it tempts us to forget Thee. But Thou knowest that it is all but a shadow, which a glance from Thee can dissipate. Hast not Thou Thyself been a man? It was sorrow that made Thee God; sorrow is an instrument of torture by which Thou hast mounted to the very throne of God, Thy Father, and it is sorrow that leads us to Thee as it led Thee to Thy Father; we come to Thee with our crown of thorns and kneel before Thy mercy-seat; we touch Thy bleeding feet with our blood-stained hands, and Thou hast suffered martyrdom for being loved by the unfortunate."

The first rays of dawn began to appear: man and nature were rousing themselves from sleep and the air was filled with the confusion of distant sounds. Weak and exhausted I was about to leave Brigitte, and seek a little repose. As I was passing out of the room, a dress thrown

on a chair slipped to the floor near me, and in its folds I spied a piece of paper. I picked it up; it was a letter, and I recognized Brigitte's hand. The envelope was not sealed. I opened it and read as follows:

23 December, 18——

"When you receive this letter I shall be far away from you, and shall perhaps never see you again. My destiny is bound up with that of a man for whom I have sacrificed everything; he can not live without me and I am going to try to die for him. I love you; adieu, and pity us."

I turned the letter over when I had read it, and saw that it was addressed to "M. Henri Smith, N——, *poste restante.*"

CHAPTER VII

On the morrow, a clear December day, a young man and a woman who rested on his arm, passed through the garden of the *Palais-Royal.* They entered a jeweler's store where they chose two similar rings which they smilingly exchanged. After a short walk they took breakfast at the *Frères-Provençaux,* in one of those little rooms which are, all things considered, one of the most beautiful spots in the world. There,

when the *garçon* had left them, they sat near the windows, hand in hand. The young man was in traveling dress; to see the joy which shone on his face, one would have taken him for a young husband showing his young wife the beauties and pleasures of Parisian life. His happiness was calm and subdued, as true happiness always is. The experienced would have recognized in him the youth who merges into manhood. From time to time he looked up at the sky, then at his companion, and tears glittered in his eyes, but he heeded them not, and smiled as he wept. The woman was pale and thoughtful, her eyes were fixed on the man. On her face were traces of sorrow which she could not conceal, although evidently touched by the exalted joy of her companion. When he smiled, she smiled too, but never alone; when he spoke, she replied and she ate what he served her; but there was about her a silence which was only broken at his instance. In her languor could be clearly distinguished that gentleness of soul, that lethargy of the weaker of two beings who love, one of whom exists only in the other and responds to him as does the echo. The young man was conscious of it and seemed proud of it and grateful for it; but it could be seen even by his pride that his happiness was new to him. When the woman became sad and her eyes fell, he cheered her with his glance; but he could

not always succeed, and seemed troubled himself. That mingling of strength and weakness, of joy and sorrow, of anxiety and serenity could not have been understood by an indifferent spectator; at times they appeared the most happy of living creatures, and the next moment the most unhappy; but although ignorant of their secret, one would have felt that they were suffering together, and, whatever their mysterious trouble, it could be seen that they had placed on their sorrow a seal more powerful than love itself—friendship. While their hands were clasped their glances were chaste; although they were alone, they spoke in low tones. As though overcome by their feelings they sat face to face, although their lips did not touch. They looked at each other tenderly and solemnly. When the clock struck one, the woman heaved a sigh and said:

"Octave, are you sure of yourself?"

"Yes, my friend, I am resolved. I will suffer much, a long time, perhaps forever; but we will cure ourselves, you with time, I with God."

"Octave, Octave," repeated the woman, "are you sure you are not deceiving yourself?"

"I do not believe we can forget each other; but I believe that we can forgive and that is what I desire even at the price of separation."

"Why could we not meet again? Why not some day—you are so young!"

Then she added with a smile: "We could see each other without danger."

"No, my friend, for you must know that I could never see you again without loving you. May he to whom I bequeath you be worthy of you! Smith is brave, good and honest, but however much you may love him, you see very well that you still love me, for if I should decide to remain, or to take you away with me, you would consent."

"It is true," replied the woman.

"True! true!" repeated the young man, looking into her eyes with all his soul. "Is it true that if I wished it you would go with me?"

Then he continued softly: "That is the reason I must never see you again. There are certain loves in life that overturn the head, the senses, the mind, the heart; there is among them all but one that does not disturb, that penetrates, and that dies only with the being in which it has taken root."

"But you will write to me?"

"Yes, at first, for what I have to suffer is so keen that the absence of the habitual object of my love would kill me. When I was unknown to you, I gradually approached closer and closer to you until—but let us not go into the past. Little by little my letters will become less frequent until they cease altogether. I will

thus descend the hill that I have been climbing for the past year. When one stands before a fresh grave, over which are engraved two cherished names, one experiences a mysterious sense of grief, which causes tears to trickle down one's cheeks; it is thus that I wish to remember having once lived."

At these words the woman threw herself on the couch and burst into tears. The young man wept with her, but he did not move and seemed anxious to appear unconscious of her emotion. When her tears ceased to flow, he approached her, took her hand in his and kissed it.

"Believe me," said he, "to be loved by you, whatever the name of the place I occupy in your heart, will give me strength and courage. Rest assured, Brigitte, no one will ever understand you better than I; another will love you more worthily, no one will love you more truly. Another will be considerate of those feelings that I offend, he will surround you with his love; you will have a better lover, you will not have a better brother. Give me your hand and let the world laugh at a word that it does not understand: Let us be friends; and adieu forever. Before we became such intimate friends there was something within that told us that we were destined to mingle our lives. Let that part of us which is still joined in God's sight never know that we have parted upon earth; let not the pal-

try chance of a moment undo the union of our eternal happiness!"

He held the woman's hand; she arose, tears streaming from her eyes, and, stepping up to the mirror with a strange smile on her face, she cut from her head a long tress of hair; then she looked at herself, thus disfigured and deprived of a part of her beautiful crown, and gave it to her lover.

The clock struck again; it was time to go; when they passed out they seemed as joyful as when they entered.

"What a glorious sun," said the young man.

"And a beautiful day," said Brigitte, "the memory of which shall never fade."

They hastened away and disappeared in the crowd. A moment later a carriage passed over a little hill beyond Fontainebleau. The young man was the only occupant; he looked for the last time upon his native town as it disappeared in the distance and thanked God that, of the three beings who had suffered through his fault, there remained but one of them still unhappy.

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